PAYING GUESTS

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PAYING GUESTS

Books by

E. F. BENSON

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PAYING GUESTS

Paying Guests

BY E. F. BENSON

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PAYING GUESTS

CHAPTER I

Bolton Spa, justly famous for the infamous savour of the waters which so magically get rid of painful deposits in the joints and muscles of the lame and the halt and for the remedial rasp of the saline baths in which the same patients were pickled daily to their great relief, had been crammed all the summer, and the proprietors of its hotels and boarding houses had been proving that for them at least rheumatism and its kindred afflictions had a silver if not a golden lining. Never had Wentworth and Balmoral and Blenheim and Belvoir entertained so continuous a complement of paying guests, and even now, though the year had wheeled into mid-October and the full season was long past, Mrs. Oxney was still booking rooms for fresh arrivals at Wentworth during the next two months. In fact, she did not know when she would get off on her holiday, and as long as the prosperous tide continued to flow she cared very little whether she got off at all.

The existence, or rather the names, of Balmoral, Blenheim, and Belvoir was a slight but standing grievance with Mrs. Oxney, the sort of grievance which occasionally kept her awake for half an hour should it perch in her consciousness and begin pecking at her mind. "For naturally," so she thought to herself in these dark vigils,

"if a lady or gentleman was thinking of coming to Bolton Spa, and wanted comfort and, I may say, luxury when they were taking the cure, they would look at the *Baths Guidebook* and imagine that Balmoral and Blenheim and Belvoir and Wentworth were all much of a muchness. And then if they chose any of the others they would find themselves in a wretched little gim-crack, semidetached villa down in the hollow, with only one bathroom and that charged extra, and the enamel all off, and cold supper on Sunday, and nobody dressing for dinner. Not that it's illegal to call yourself Balmoral, far from it, but there's nothing to prevent you calling your house Boiled Rabbit or Castor Oil, but those that haven't got big houses ought to have enough proper pride not to miscall them by big names."

Mrs. Oxney's grievance was as well founded as most little vexations of the kind, for certainly Wentworth was a very different class of house from Balmoral and Blenheim and Belvoir, which, though it might possibly be libellous to call them gimcrack, could not be described as other than semidetached. There could not be any divergence of opinion over that point or over the singleness of their bathrooms and the cold supper on Sunday. Wentworth, on the other hand, was so entirely and magnificently detached that nobody would dream of calling it detached at all: you might as well call a ship at sea detached. The nearest house to it was at least a hundred yards away, and on all sides but one more like a quarter of a mile, and the whole of that territory was "grounds." It had gardens (kitchen and flower), it had

tennis courts (hard and soft) and croquet lawn (hard or soft according to the state of the weather), and a large field in which Colonel Chase had induced Mrs. Oxney to make five widely sundered putting-greens, one in each corner and one in the middle like the five of diamonds. The variety of holes therefore was immense, for you could play from any one hole to any other hole, and thus make a round of twenty holes, a total unrivalled by any championship course, which, so the colonel told Mrs. Oxney, had never more than eighteen. As for bathrooms, Wentworth already had twice as many as any of the semidetached villas with those magnificent but deceptive names, and Mrs. Oxney was intending to put in a third, while in contrast with their paltry cold supper on Sunday the guests at Wentworth enjoyed on that day a dinner of peculiar profusion and delicacy, for there was a savoury as well as a sweet, and dessert. All these points of superiority made it a bitter thought that visitors could be so ill-informed as to class Wentworth with establishments of similar title. But throughout this summer Mrs. Oxney had seldom brooded over this possible misconception for, as she was saying to her sister as they sat out under the cedar by the croquet lawn, she asked nothing more than to have Wentworth permanently full. She was a tall gray-haired woman, who as a girl, with a mop of black hair, a quick beady eye, and a long nose, had been remarkably like a crow. But now the black hair had turned a most becoming gray, the beady eye was alive with kindliness, and the long nose was rendered less beaklike by the filling out of her face. From

her mouth, when she talked to her guests, came a perennial stream of pleasant observations, and she presented to the world a very comely and amiable appearance. Her sister, Amy Bertram, who like herself was a widow and ran the house in rather subordinate partnership with her, was still crowlike and unlike Mrs. Oxney had a remarkable capacity for seeing the dark side of every situation and for suitably croaking over it.

She shook her head over Margaret's contented retrospect.

"Things may not be so bad just for the moment," she said, "and as most of the rooms are engaged up till Christmas, we may get through this year all right. But we must be prepared to be very empty from then onwards, for a good season like this is always followed by a very empty one. How we shall manage to get through the spring is more than I can tell you: don't ask me. And I do hope, Margaret, that you'll think twice before putting in that extra bathroom. It will be a great expense and you must reckon on spending double the estimate."

"Nonsense, my dear," said Margaret. "They've contracted for a fixed sum—high enough, too—for doing everything down to a hot towel-rail, and they've got to carry it out."

Amy shook her head again.

"Then you'll find if you keep them to the contract there'll be bad workmanship somewhere. I know what plumbers are. The taps will leak, and the towel-rail be cold. Besides, I can't think what you want with a third bathroom. It seems to me that it's just to humour Col-

onel Chase, who would like one nearer his bedroom. I'm sure the other bathrooms are hardly used at all as it is. Most of our guests don't want a bath if after breakfast they are going to soak for a quarter of an hour down at the Establishment. I shouldn't dream of putting another in. And Miss Howard is sure to make a fuss if there's hammering and workmen going on all day and night next to her room."

Mrs. Oxney felt this point was worth considering, for though it was worth while to please Colonel Chase it was certainly not worth while to displease Miss Howard. These two were not guests who came for a three weeks' cure and were gone again, but practically permanent inmates of Wentworth who had lived here for more than a year, and when their interests conflicted it was necessary to be wary.

"I'm sure I don't want to fuss Miss Howard," she said, "though I don't know how I can get out of it now. I've promised the colonel that there shall be a new bathroom put in and let him choose that white tile-paper——"

Amy gave a short hollow croak.

"That's the most expensive of all the patterns," she said.

"And lasts longer," said Mrs. Oxney. "But it might be as well to put it off till after Christmas for Miss Howard is sure to go to Torquay for a couple of weeks then and it could be done in her absence."

"As like as not she won't be able to get away," said Mrs. Bertram, "for if the coalstrike goes on the rail-

ways will all have stopped long before that. I saw a leader in the paper about it this morning which said there wasn't a ray of hope on the whole horizon. Not a ray. And the whole horizon. Indeed I don't know what we shall do as soon as the cold weather begins, as it's bound to do soon, for after a warm autumn there's always a severe winter. How we shall keep a fire going for the kitchen I can't imagine. I could wish there weren't so many rooms booked up till Christmas. And as for hot water for the baths——"

"Oh, that's coke," said Mrs. Oxney. "As soon as we start the central heating it and the hot water are run by the same furnace. You know that quite well, so where's the use of saying that? There's plenty of coke. You just try to get into the coke cellar and shut the door behind you. You couldn't do it."

Amy sighed: there was resignation more than relief in the sigh.

"Anyhow the coal is getting low enough," she said to console herself. "I'm sure I don't see how we shall keep the house open at all when we have to begin fires in the rooms. There's Miss Howard: she likes the drawing room to be nothing else but an oven by after breakfast, and there's the colonel as grumpy as a bear if the smoking room isn't fit to roast an ox in after tea. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be better to shut Wentworth up altogether when the frosts begin. There's nothing that makes guests so discontented as a cold house. Once get the reputation for chilliness and ruin stares at you. People coming here for the cure won't stand it. They'll pack

up and go to the Bolton Arms or to Balmoral. Better say that we're closed. Belvoir, too: I was walking along the road to the back of it yesterday, and the coal-cellar door was open. Crammed: I shouldn't like to say how many tons. Where they get it from I don't know: some underhand means, I'm sadly afraid."

Mrs. Oxney had not been attending much to her sister's familiar litanies but the thought of those semi-detached hovels, suggested by the mention of Belvoir, put a bright idea into her head.

"I tell you what I shall do," she said. "I shall take a whole page in the *Baths Guidebook to Bolton,* and advertise Wentworth properly so that everybody shall know that it isn't an ordinary boarding house, in a row with the butcher's opposite. Golf links, twenty holes, two tennis courts, one hard croquet lawn, kitchen and flower garden, and a tasteful view of the lounge."

"It will be very expensive," said Mrs. Bertram, who was really enthusiastic about this idea of her sister's but was compelled by all the dominant instincts of her nature to see the objections to any course of action.

"Not a bit," said Mrs. Oxney. "It will pay for itself ten times over. Let people know they can play lawn tennis all the winter——"

"Not if it snows," said Mrs. Bertram.

"Amy, let me finish my sentence. Tennis all the winter, and the breakfast lounge as well as the drawing room, and central heating and no extras for baths in three bathrooms, and standing in its own grounds."

"But they all stand in their own grounds," said Mrs. Bertram.

"Stuff and nonsense, Amy. 'Grounds' means something spacious, not a gravel path leading round a monkey-puzzle. And no cold supper on Sundays. I shall say that too."

That point was debated: to say that there was no cold supper on Sunday night implied, so Mrs. Bertram sadly surmised, that there was cold supper all the week, and nothing at all on Sundays, and such a misconception would be lamentably alien to the effect that this sumptuous advertising was designed to produce. Mrs. Oxney therefore agreed to word this differently or omit it altogether, and hurried indoors to find the most tasteful view of the lounge for the photographer.

The morning hours between breakfast and lunch were always the most depopulated time of the day at Wentworth, for the majority of its guests were patients who went down to the baths in the mornings to drink the abominable waters or to lie pickled in tubs of brine, and return, some in the motor bus and the more stalwart on their feet, in time to have an hour's prescribed rest before lunch. The two permanent inmates of the house, Colonel Chase and Miss Alice Howard, were, so far from being patients, in the enjoyment of the ruddest health, but they, too, were never at home on fine mornings like this, for Miss Howard had left the house by ten o'clock with her satchel of painting apparatus and a small folding stool, which when properly adjusted never pinched her anywhere or collapsed, and sketched

from nature till lunch time. On her return she put up on the chimney piece of the lounge the artistic fruit of her labours for the delectation and compliments of her fellow guests. These water-colour sketches were for the most part suave and sentimental and represented the church tower of St. Giles's seen over the fields, or above trees with reflections in the river, or dim effects of dusk (though painted by broad daylight, since it was impossible to get the colour right otherwise) with scattered lights gleaming from cottage windows and possibly a crescent moon (body colour) in the west. Garden beds, still-life studies of petunias, and Mrs. Oxney's cat were rarer subjects, but much admired.

Colonel Chase's occupations in the morning were equally regular and more physically strenuous, for either he bicycled, seldom less than thirty miles, or walked not less than eight as recorded by his pedometer. He had two pedometers, one giddily affixed to the hub of his bicycle's hind wheel and the other, for pedestrian purposes, incessantly hung by a steel chain from his braces: this one clicked once at every step of his great strong legs and it was wonderful how far he walked every day. Thus, though his fellow guests at Wentworth could not, as in Miss Howard's case, feast their eyes on the actual fruits of his energy, since this would have implied the visualization of so many miles of road, they could always be (and were) informed of the immense distance he had traversed, which was, he felt sure, a source of admiring envy to the crippled and encouraged them to regain their lost activity. Mrs. Holders, for

instance, who a fortnight ago had only just been able to hobble down to the Bath establishment on two sticks, and was always driven up again in the motor bus, and who now was able, on her good days, to walk both ways with the assistance of only one stick, had great jokes with him about her increasing mobility. She used to say that when she came back in the spring she would go out with him for his walk in the morning and take her treatment in the afternoon when he was resting. She seemed to take the greatest interest in his athletic feats and used to drink in all he said with an air of reverent and rapt attention. Occasionally, however, when Colonel Chase was least conscious of being humorous (though no one could be more so if he wanted) she gave a little mouselike squeal of laughter and then became intensely serious again. This puzzled him till he thought of what was no doubt the right explanation, namely, that Mrs. Holders had suddenly thought of something amusing which had nothing to do with him and his conversation. For the rest she was a middle-aged, roundabout little personage, with a plain vivacious face and highly arched eyebrows, so that she looked in a permanent state of surprise, though nobody knew what she was surprised about. Miss Howard thought of her as "quaint," and Mrs. Holders did not think of Miss Howard at all.

There had lately been a tree felled in the field where the twenty-hole golf links lay and when her sister went indoors to look for the tasteful photograph of the lounge, Mrs. Bertram walked through the garden and out onto the links to see what it was worth in the way

of logs for the fires in this shortage of coal. The tree had been dead for more than a year and she had repeatedly urged Margaret to have it cut down while it was still sound and had not degenerated into touchwood. But Mrs. Oxney had been very obstinate about it, weak but obstinate, for a green woodpecker had built in it and she said it would be such a shame to cut it down and completely upset the poor dickie-bird's domestic arrangements. Then, when the woodpecker had quite finished with it, Colonel Chase said it made a first-rate hazard for the seventeenth and nineteenth holes (the long diagonal across the field), which meant that he was the only player who could loft his ball over it without going round, and it was not till yesterday that Mrs. Oxney had steeled herself to the destruction of this magnificent bunker. Now, of course, as Mrs. Bertram had woefully anticipated, the tree was not more than a great cracknel kept together by bark, and the colonel might just as well have been left to go on soaring over it or hitting into it as before.

As she walked back to the house from this depressing expedition she heard the hoot of the motor bus which brought back the patients from the baths announcing its return. There were the usual three occupants (since Mrs. Holders had taken to walking up) : Mr. Kemp and his downtrodden daughter Florence, both habitual guests at Wentworth, and Mr. Bullingdon, who was paying his first visit to Bolton Spa. Though he was quite a young man Mrs. Bertram felt sure that a bath chair would soon be his only mode of locomotion, but in spite

of his poor knees which made him move as if he was performing a cakewalk with his two sticks for a partner, he was full of jokes and gaiety. He laughed at himself in the most engaging manner and said that he really wasn't sure that he wanted to get better, since he attracted so much flattering attention, wherever he went, by reason of his antics. Apart from these flippant allusions to his own afflictions he never talked about arthritis at all, which was a great contrast to Mr. Kemp, whose idea of pleasant conversation was to pin a listener into a corner from which escape was difficult, and beginning with the 3d of March, 1920, which was the date on which he first felt a throbbing in his left hip, recount the progress of his rheumatism. He had visited Harrogate, Buxton, Bath, Droitwich, Aix, and Marienbad but none of them had really done him any good; but there was still a chance that Bolton, in combination with some of the others, and Bournemouth for the winter, might benefit him. . . . Just as Mrs. Bertram reached the door he was balanced on the step of the motor bus and warning Mr. Bullingdon about a certain malignant masseur at Aix.

"Don't you let him touch your knee with the tips of his fingers," he said, "if you're thinking of going to Aix. I was getting on nicely there, as my daughter will tell you, when my doctor recommended me to have treatment at the hands of this villain. In a week or less he had undone all the good I had derived from Aix and when I left I wasn't walking much better than you. What was his name, Florence?"

"Jean Cuissot," said Florence in a monotonous voice. She knew her father would ask her that.

"Nonsense. Jean Cuissot was the masseur I went to the year before. No, I believe you're right, it was Jean Cuissot. Judias Iscariot would be a better name for him. Give me your arm, please, unless you want me to stand on the step for the rest of my life. Ah, dear me, I've got a new pain in my ankle this morning. I woke in the night and felt it wasn't comfortable and I expected I should have trouble. Why, there's Mrs. Holders already. She has walked all the way up from the baths. I haven't been able to walk back after my bath since I was at Harrogate two seasons ago, and the hill there is neither so long nor so steep as this. But I used to think nothing of it then. What wouldn't I give to be able to walk up such a hill now!"

Mrs. Bertram, who was lending a firm shoulder to Mr. Kemp while his daughter disentangled his sticks, which had got muddled up in some inexplicable manner between his legs and the door of the bus, sighed heavily.

"Yes, indeed," she said. "We so seldom appreciate our blessings till they are taken from us, and then we haven't got them to appreciate. But Bolton may set you up yet, Mr. Kemp; you never can tell."

Mr. Bullingdon, now that the doorway of the bus was clear, performed a sort of mystic dance down the steps and onto the ground.

"There we are," he said cheerfully. "You know they ought to engage Mrs. Holders and Mr. Kemp and me for a short turn at a music hall. It would have an immense

success, screams of laughter. There would be a glass of champagne on one side of the stage and we three toeing the mark on the other. Then at the word 'Go' we would start off and see who could grab it first. Mrs. Holders would have to be handicapped, though, you and I wouldn't stand a chance against her, Mr. Kemp."

Mr. Kemp was inclined to be offended at the suggestion of his appearing at a music hall, and his daughter and Mrs. Bertram closed in behind him and propelled him into the house. Besides, as everybody ought to know, champagne was poison to him; you might as well expect him to race for a glass of prussic acid.

With the dispersal of the passengers by the ambulance wagon (as Jim Bullingdon always flippantly called the bus) to their rooms to rest before lunch, the house was quiet again till the arrival of Miss Howard with her satchel and her camp stool. The twilight scene on which she had been engaged this sunny morning had been giving her a great deal of trouble, for the dusk even to her indulgent eye was of a strange soupy quality, as if some dark, viscous fluid had been emitted from an unknown source (for she had not intended it) onto the landscape, and the lights from the cottages looked like some curious eruption of orange spots. It was very disappointing for she had hoped great things from this sketch; but now when she put it up on the chimney piece of the lounge, the effect was puzzling rather than pleasing. Luckily, however, she found that a small flat parcel had arrived for her; this she knew could be nothing else than Evening Bells, which she had sent a week ago to

be framed by Mr. Bowen. That, up till now, was certainly her *chef d'œuvre:* Mrs. Oxney had declared that she could positively hear the bells, and so Miss Howard had caused to be printed on the mount of this masterpiece, "The mellow lin-lan-lone of evening bells." There was the tower of St. Giles's church reflected in the river which had caused that pretty thought to come into Mrs. Oxney's mind, and Miss Howard was sure that everybody would like to see Evening Bells again in its gilt frame. So she replaced the soupy twilight in her satchel and determined to put it under the tap when she went upstairs to see if a thorough washing down would not render it more translucent. There was half an hour yet before lunch time and she tripped into the drawing room to get a good practice on the mellow but elderly piano.

Miss Alice Howard was a pathetic person, though she would have been very much surprised if anyone had told her so. She had been an extremely pretty girl, lively and intelligent and facile, but by some backhanded stroke of fate she had never married; and now at the age of forty, though she had parted with her youth, she had relinquished no atom of her girlishness. She hardly ever walked but tripped, she warbled little snatches of song when she thought that anyone might be within hearing in order to refresh them with her maidenly brightness, and sat on the hearth rug in front of the fire, even though there was a far more comfortable seat ready. It was not that she felt any profound passion for tripping, warbling, squatting, but from constantly telling herself that she was barely out of her teens she had got to believe in

her girlishness and behave accordingly. Her imagination (here was the root of the matter) was incessantly exercised on herself and she imagined all sorts of things about herself that had little or no foundation in fact. She could scarcely have told you how or when, for instance, she began to believe that she was closely connected with a noble house, but certainly all Wentworth believed it now though they could have had no other informant but her, and Miss Howard very nearly believed it too, so constantly had she made rich little allusions which implied it. She had a commodious, semidetached villa of her own, conveniently close to the station at Tunbridge Wells, but it was lonely work to live there by herself and she had let it furnished for the last year, and hoped to do so again for the next. The occupant was a gentleman on the Stock Exchange called Mr. Gradge, who lived there with his sister, but she always referred to them as "my tenants" and to the semidetached villa as "my little place" in Kent. She thus contrived to produce the impression that the villa was a small ancestral manor house, and sometimes lamented that the monstrously swollen taxes of late years had caused so many country houses to be shut up or let: she thought herself very lucky to be able to let her little place in Kent near (though it really was "at") Tunbridge Wells. Miss Howard, in fact, though girlish, suffered from the essentially middle-aged disease of confluent fabrication, and whether she looked at her physical image in the tall looking-glass in her bedroom or contemplated herself in

the mirror of her mind, she now saw what she had got to believe about herself.

She was quite alone in the world without near relations or any intimate friend, and with the little place in Kent let to her tenants, she lived at Wentworth for the greater part of the year, spent a month at a similar boarding house at Torquay, which she called her Christmas holidays, and had another holiday in a third-rate boarding house in South Kensington for a fortnight of the London season. From there she came back to Wentworth quite worn out with gaiety; everyone had been so kind and pleased to see her, and how her cousin had scolded her for insisting on going back to Bolton after so short a visit. But she was much happier at Wentworth than anywhere else for she had come to be, not only in her own eyes but in Mrs. Oxney's and those of the other guests, a sort of incarnation of all the Muses. She painted, she sang and played, she danced to the strains of the gramophone with any sound pair of legs among the guests or, if there happened to be none, she was quite willing to execute a *pas seul* in the lounge after dinner, which Mrs. Oxney, who always said the agreeable thing, considered equal to the best Russian dancing. And then there was her lawn tennis, though she shook her head at the suggestion that she should enter at Wimbledon next year, for that would mean giving up so much of her sketching and her music. And then there was her croquet and her golf . . .

She sat down at the piano after removing her hat

(shaped like an inverted waste-paper basket and trimmed with three sorts of grapes, pink, blue, and orange) and deftly encouraged her pale brown hair to drop in rebellious disorder over her forehead and nearly conceal an ear that was like a pink shell. She ran her hands over the keys: someone had told her—or had she invented it for herself?—that she had a "butterfly touch." And when the butterflies alighted on one or two flowers where the careless things were trespassing Miss Howard said "Naughty!" to them and made them do it again. She was supposed to have an amazing power of improvisation, and these industrious little practices, with the soft pedal down while everyone was resting upstairs, certainly developed her gift. There were some fragments of Chopin which were landmarks for the improvisation when it seemed to be wandering and put it back on the road again. Miss Howard could scarcely tell sometimes whether certain bits belonged to her own butterfly or Chopin's, and if she couldn't tell she felt sure that nobody else at Wentworth could. Presently the gong in the lounge announced that lunch was ready (Miss Howard would have winced at that brazen booming if anyone had been present) but she took no notice of the summons for she knew that Mrs. Oxney would probably come tiptoeing in and find her quite lost in her music, sitting there with dreamy eyes fixed on the ceiling and a smile hovering—just that—on her mouth.

It all happened just as she had anticipated and out of the corner of a dreamy eye she saw Mrs. Oxney enter and sit down with a long elaborate creak beside the door,

but she did not officially see her until she stumbled over a chromatic run. She gave a little start and an exclamation of surprise.

"Oh, Mrs. Oxney," she said, "how did you steal in without my noticing? And how wicked of you to creep into the corner and listen to my bunglings! Fingers so naughty and stiff this morning: I could slap the tiresome things for being so stupid. Is it nearly lunch time? Have you come in to tell me to run upstairs and brush my hair and wash my hands? Must I?"

"Certainly you needn't, for you've given me such a treat," said Mrs. Oxney. "I could listen to you playing forever, Miss Howard. Tiddle-iddle, iddle-iddle-iddle! I call it wonderful, without a note to guide you. I wish my fingers were as naughty as that. As for it's being lunch time, why, the gong rang five minutes ago, but I couldn't punish myself by interrupting you."

Miss Howard was perfectly aware that Mrs. Oxney was a musical imbecile, but in spite of that her appreciation gave her strong satisfaction. She was also aware that the gong had sounded five minutes ago, so she gave another little exclamation of surprise at this astonishing news.

"Fancy!" she said. "But when I get to the piano I become so stupid and absent-minded. I came in so hungry half an hour ago, hoping it was lunch time, and I declare I've got no feeling of hunger left now. Music feeds me, I think: even my feeble little strummings are meat and drink to me. Yes: little bits of Chopin. How lovely to have known Chopin! I wish I had known Chopin."

"Well, why didn't you ever ask your mamma to get him to come down to your place in Kent?" asked Mrs. Oxney. "He'd have liked to hear you play, I'll be bound."

Miss Howard gave her silvery little laugh.

"Dear thing!" she said. "Chopin was a friend of great-grandmamma and let's see, which was it? Yes, Great-grandmamma Stanley. She went to see him at Majorca or Minorca."

"I have made a mistake then," said Mrs. Oxney, "but you're so good-natured, Miss Howard. And I've come to trespass on your good-nature, too."

"You sha'n't be prosecuted," said Miss Howard gaily, "trespass away."

"Well, it's this then," said Mrs. Oxney. "There's to be an entertainment at the Assembly Rooms next week, and the Committee deputed me to ask you if you wouldn't play at it. Such a treat it would be, and I'm sure everybody in Bolton would flock to hear you. It's for a good object, too, the Children's Hospital in the town."

"How you all work me!" said Miss Howard, immensely pleased at being asked, and beginning to fix on the waste-paper basket. "It's sheer bullying, for you know I couldn't refuse to do anything for the dear mites. How I shall have to practise if I'm to be made to play in public."

"So much the better for Wentworth," said Mrs. Oxney. "Then I may tell them that you will? I do call that kind. And what bits will you play? They'd like it best, I'll be bound, if you played one of your own beautiful improvisations. That would be a thing people couldn't

hear at an ordinary concert. 'Improvisation by Miss Howard'! And then that wouldn't call for any practice at all."

"Dear thing!" said Miss Howard again. "If you only knew how it takes it out of me! Such dreaming and yet such concentration! But you shall have your way."

Meals were served with military punctuality at Wentworth and the pianist and her impresario were very late, to Colonel Chase's high indignation, for if people were late the service was delayed and the punctual suffered for the inconsiderateness of the laggards. At breakfast, which, from habits formed in India, he called "chota-hazri," unpunctuality did not matter, but tiffin (lunch) was another affair. He was also soured this morning by the fact that the giddy pedometer in his bicycle had got out of order. He had felt supernormally energetic when he went out for his ride and had pedalled away in the most splendid form for nearly three hours, feeling certain that he was breaking his previous record of thirty-five miles and anticipating many congratulations on this athletic feat, which would give so much pleasure to others as well as himself. Then, when on arrival at Wentworth he had got off his bicycle with rather trembling knees and completely out of breath to feast his eyes on the disk which would surely register thirty-six miles at least, he found its idiotic hand pointing to the ridiculous figure of nine miles and a quarter. It was most aggravating: he would have to take the wretched instrument to be repaired this afternoon, instead of resting after lunch, and very likely it would not be ready by to-

morrow morning, so that once more he would not know how far he had been. That would play the deuce with his aggregate for the month, which he sedulously entered in a notebook. At one end of it was the record of the miles he had bicycled and upside down at the other the miles he had walked; and now it would appear that he had only bicycled nine and a quarter miles on October 17th, and perhaps none at all on October 18th.

These depressing reflections, combined with Miss Howard's unpunctuality, caused him to utter a mere grunt to her salutation as she tripped by his table with all the grapes in her hat wagging and sat down at her own table in the window where she could see the church tower and feed the sweet birdies with crumbs when she had fed herself.

"And how many miles did you go this morning, Colonel?" she asked as she unfolded her napkin. Interest in his prowess always pleased him and of course she did not know how wicked the pedometer had been.

"Most aggravating!" he said. "That wretched instrument of mine got out of order, and after nearly three hours of the hardest riding I've ever done it registered nine miles and a quarter."

There was a general murmur of sympathy with him and indignation with the pedometer. Unfortunately, Mrs. Holders tried to say something amusing: she could not have done anything more dangerous. Reckless in fact: highly culpable.

"Nine and a quarter miles in under three hours?" she

said. "I should call that very good going. I've often been less."

That was like an application of the bellows to Colonel Chase's smouldering wrath. If there was one subject which must be treated with deference and respect it was his own bicycling, and he burst into flame.

"Considerably less, I should think, ma'am," he said. "Waitress, I said bread-and-butter pudding half an hour ago and I don't see why I should be kept waiting till tea time because others don't come in to lunch."

"He's gone off into one of his tantrums," whispered Mrs. Oxney to her sister. "Run into the kitchen, Amy, and bring it yourself and a nice jug of cream with it."

Miss Howard was grieved at this piece of rudeness: Howards never behaved like that. Such a peppery old thing: as if anybody cared how many miles he went on his bicycle. Sometimes she wished he would ride away for hundreds of miles in a straight line and never come back. And then sometimes she thought that if he had only a clever young wife to look after him she would soon cure him of his roughnesses. So she put her nose slightly in the air and ate curried chicken with great elegance in a spoon, which Colonel Chase said was the right way to eat curry.

The nice jug of cream had a mollifying effect, and when Miss Howard came out from her lunch Colonel Chase was explaining to a sycophantic audience where he had gone, and it was unanimously decided that he must have ridden at least thirty-eight miles, which was

indeed joyful. He decided in consequence to forgive Miss Howard for being late for lunch and to show the plenitude of his magnanimity he strolled across to the chimney piece to admire Evening Bells.

"I'll enter it as thirty-eight miles, then, in my log-book," he said, "if you all insist on it. Why there's another of your sketches, Miss Howard, though I think I've seen it before. Very pretty, I'm sure. What's that written underneath it? 'The mellow lanoline——' "

Miss Howard was also ready to forgive and gave a laughing peal of bells on her own account.

"How can you be so naughty?" she said. " 'The mellow lin-lan-lone,' Colonel. Tennyson, you know. Such a sweet poem—I shall have to find it for you."

"I declare I can hear the bells," said Miss Kemp, shamelessly plagiarizing from Mrs. Oxney. "Delicious, Miss Howard. So poetical."

Her father, who had been examining the sketch from a purely hygienic point of view, shook his head.

"I shouldn't like to go to evening service in that church," he said. "All among the trees, you know, with the river close by. I should wake up with a bad attack of lumbago next morning, I'm afraid. Churches are draughty places at the best of times, and if you walk there you're liable to get heated and then have to sit for an hour in the cold, while if you drive there as like as not you've got chilly already and that's even worse. I sha'n't ever forget the chill I got in church at Harrogate. It was a damp morning and I should have been wiser not to go. I declare it makes me shiver to look at that church of

Miss Howard's so close to the river. I might manage morning service there but it would be very ill-advised to go in the evening."

Colonel Chase had finished the coffee which Mrs. Oxney had sent him as a propitiator. It had arrived with her compliments, for coffee after lunch was an extra.

"Well, I must get down to the town to have my pedometer looked to," he said, "and then how about a few holes at golf, Miss Howard? I'll be back in twenty minutes. That'll make a pretty good day's exercise for me."

"Marvellous!" said Miss Howard.

"But nothing to what I used to do not so many years back in India," he said. "Military duties, parade, and what not in the morning, and a polo match after tiffin, and perhaps a game of rackets after tea, and a couple of hundred at billiards before I got to my bridge. That's the way to keep fit and get no bad news from your liver, if the ladies will excuse the expression."

Mrs. Holders was not so forgiving as Miss Howard. She waited till he had passed the window, pedalling hard with his chest well out, and then gave her mouse squeal of laughter.

"And it's early closing," she said. "He'll come tiffining back and serve him right for being rude. I can't stand rudeness."

Mrs. Oxney, who had joined the group round Evening Bells, wrung her hands in dismay.

"Oh, what have you done, Mrs. Holders?" she said. "I am sorry. That beautiful hot coffee which I sent the colonel, why, I might as well never have sent it at all, so

vexed he'll be to find it's early closing. And then, if he's not too much upset to play golf, he'll see that I've had his favourite tree cut down, and it's fallen right across the green in the middle of the field, and that'll be another cause for vexation. I must send the gardeners to see if they can't haul it away before he gets back. Dear me, what a day of misfortunes!"

"And little better than touchwood when all's said and done," moaned Mrs. Bertram.

So the two sisters, who usually joined the guests in the lounge after lunch for a friendly chat, cut this short, and one hurried away to dispatch gardeners to the scene of the disaster, in hopes of clearing it before the colonel came back from his futile errand to the town, and the other to order hot scones for tea, of which he was inordinately fond. Though dirty weather might be anticipated, Mrs. Holders was quite impenitent and kept bursting into little squeals of merriment.

"Serve him right, serve him right," she repeated. "He was rude to me, and that's what he gets for it. If those are army manners give me the navy."

This was a revolutionary utterance: the red flag seemed to flutter. Colonel Chase had hitherto been regarded at Wentworth as something cosmic, like a thunderstorm or a fine day. You could dislike or be frightened of the thunderstorm and hide in a dark place till its fury was past, or you could enjoy the fine day, but you had to accept whichever it might happen to be. He was stuffy on the thunderstorm days and sunny on the others and you must take the weather as it came.

"Here we all are," continued the rebel, "and we've got to be pleasant to each other and not fly into passions or behave like kings and emperors, however long we've spent in India, and however many tigers and tiffins we've shot. For my part I never believed much in his story of the tiger which charged him, and which he shot through the heart when it was two inches away. I'm sure I wish evil to nobody but I shouldn't have minded if the tiger had given him a good nip first, to teach him manners. And why he should have jugs of cream at lunch and hot scones for tea because he lost his temper I'm sure I don't know. Skim milk and a bit of dry bread would have been more suitable."

These awful remarks were addressed to Tim Bullingdon only, for the sisters had gone to avert the wrath to come, Miss Howard had taken the soupy twilight sketch to the tap, and Florence Kemp had gone out with her father to the chairs under the cedar, where she read aloud to him till he went to sleep.

"I wouldn't have been in his regiment for anything," said Tim; cakewalking about the lounge, for gentle exercise, though painful, was recommended. "I would sooner have been in hell."

"So would I," said Mrs. Holders cordially, "and thought it very agreeable in comparison. By the way, there's an envelope on the writing table in the smoking room addressed to his Excellency the Viceroy. That's meant for us to see. Have you seen it?"

"Good Lord, yes," said Tim. "It's been there since yesterday morning. I put it in the waste-paper basket

once, but it's back again and getting quite dusty. If it's there to-morrow morning, I shall address another envelope to King George, Personal."

Mrs. Holders squealed again.

"That would be a beauty for him," she said. "Mind you do it. Here he is back from the town, coming up the drive. What a red face!"

Colonel Chase banged the front door and came puffing into the lounge.

"Pretty state of things!" he said. "It seems a perpetual holiday for the working classes. That's what makes them out of hand. Early closing to-day, and late opening to-morrow, I shouldn't wonder, and then comes Sunday, and I shouldn't be surprised if it was a Bank-holiday on Monday."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Holders. "Then you've had your ride for nothing. What a disappointment! Never mind, get a good game of golf."

Colonel Chase flung himself into a chair and mopped his face.

"And no sign of Miss Howard," he said. "I told her I should be back in twenty minutes. Women have no idea of time. *Qui-hi,* Miss Howard."

"I expect that's Hindustanee," said Mrs. Holders. "What a pleasure to talk so many languages. *Parlez-vous français, monsieur?*"

Colonel Chase had again that horrid sense of uncertainty as to whether Mrs. Holders was not in some abstruse manner poking fun at him but, as usual, the notion seemed incredible. Then snatches of song were

heard from the landing at the top of the stairs and Miss Howard came tripping along it. The tap water had done wonders for the viscous fog and she looked forward to making a success of her sketch after all. It was to be called "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day." She carried her bag of golf clubs with her and was quite ready.

The two went out together through the garden to the golf field. A perfect swarm of gardeners and odd men and chauffeurs and boot boys were busy hauling the touchwood tree from the middle green.

"Why, what's all this?" said Colonel Chase, stopping short. "My tree, my hazard, my bunker, my favourite hazard. Cut down! Upon my word now! I wonder by whose orders that was done. Ah, there's Mrs. Oxney. What's all this, Mrs. Oxney?"

Mrs. Oxney came forward like Esther before Ahasuerus.

"Oh, dear me, such a sad accident, Colonel," she said, "though it will be all right in a few minutes now. The tree fell right across the green. So clumsy! But they've got it moving. I had to have it cut down: all gone at the root and so dangerous. What should I have felt if it had come crashing down when you were in the middle of one of your beautiful puttings?"

This was an improvisation as brilliant as Miss Howard's on the piano and far less rehearsed. But it gave little satisfaction.

"Well, you've removed the only decent hazard in the place," he said. "I'm sorry it has happened, for I've

been toiling all the summer to get a few sporting holes for you. I should have thought you might have had it propped up or something of the sort. No matter. Take the honour, Miss Howard, and let's be off, or it will be dark before we've played our twenty holes."

CHAPTER II

THIS inauspicious afternoon finished better than might have been anticipated. The colonel's favourite hazard, it is true, was laid low, but the trunk now dragged to the edge of the green was discovered to be a very well-placed bunker when Miss Howard put her ball underneath it in an unplayable position and thus enabled Colonel Chase to win the match. Then it was found that Mrs. Oxney's chauffeur, who was an ingenious mechanic, could put the pedometer to rights with the greatest ease. (He geared it a shade too high, so that for the future when Colonel Chase had ridden seven eighths of a mile it recorded a full mile, and so ever afterward when he rode thirty-two miles, as he so often did, he could inform admiring Wentworth, with indisputable evidence to back him, that he had ridden thirty-six. A pleasing spell of record-breaking ensued.

After a quantity of hot scones for tea he retired to his bedroom, according to his usual custom, for a couple of hours of solid reading before dinner. He took from a small bookshelf above his bed, which contained for the most part old army lists, an antique copy of Macaulay's *Essays,* which he had won as a prize for Geography at school, and before settling down to work made himself very comfortable in a large armchair with his

pipe and tobacco handy. Then he glanced at the news in the evening paper, which for many months now had put him in a towering passion since it so largely concerned the coal strike. All strikers, according to his firm knowledge, were damned lazy skunks, who refused to do a stroke of work because they preferred to be supported in idle luxury by the dole, while Mr. Cook was a Bolshevist whom Colonel Chase, so he repeatedly affirmed, would have rejoiced to hang with his own hands, having heartily flogged him first. There would soon have been an end of the strike if the weak-kneed government had only done what he had recommended from the very beginning. . . . Then in order to quiet and calm his mind, he mused over a cross-word puzzle, jotting down in pencil the solutions which seemed to fit. Half an hour generally sufficed to break the back of it and then he leaned back in his chair, opened Macaulay's *Essays* at random, and gave himself up to meditation.

This meditation was always agreeable, for its origin, the cave out of which it so generously gushed, was his strong and profound satisfaction with himself, and this gave a pleasant flavour to whatever he thought about. He had had a thoroughly creditable, though uneventful, career in the army, and on his retirement two years ago found himself able to contemplate the past and await the future with British equanimity. Being unmarried and possessed of a comfortable competence, he could live for a couple of months in the year in furnished rooms close to his club in London, and for the other ten at this admirably conducted boarding establishment, thus

escaping all the responsibilities of housekeeping and of friendship. In London armchair acquaintances sufficed for social needs, they afforded him rubbers of bridge in the cardroom, and ample opportunities to curse the weather and the government in company with kindred spirits; for the rest of the day the perusal of the morning and the evening papers and an hour's constitutional tramp round the park fulfilled the needs of mind and body. At Wentworth, similarly, his bicycle rides, his excellent meals, his comfortable bedroom supplied his physical wants, and he had the additional mental satisfaction of being undisputed cock of the walk, whereas among the members of his club there was a sad tendency to think themselves as good as he. But here his tastes and his conveniences were consulted before those of any other guests, cream was poured forth for the mollification of his tantrums, and his wish was of the nature of law to the economies of the establishment. He was convinced that Mrs. Oxney had no greater pleasure in life than to please him, no greater cross to bear than the sense that all had not been as he would have had it; he regarded himself as being looked on with a pleasant mixture of awe and respectful affection. Every now and then, it is true, there appeared here some outsider who did not seem duly reverential, and at the present moment he had occasional doubts about the true state of Mrs. Holders's sentiments with regard to him, but such possible exceptions were negligible and temporary. They came for their few weeks of cure and passed away again. He bore them no real ill will and hoped they had bene-

fited by their stay. He and Miss Howard alone went on forever, and on the whole he was very much pleased with Miss Howard; and when, in his more romantic moments, she appeared to unusual advantage as she sat in profile against a dark wall (a rather favourite position of hers) he wondered if he would be more comfortable with an establishment of his own and a presentable middle-aged woman to look after him and bear his name. Her occasional allusions to her little place in Kent were interesting. Indeed, he really asked very little of life; only that he should be quite well, and ride a great many miles on his bicycle, and that Wentworth should unweariedly admire all he did, and sun itself in his approbation. Given that these modest requirements had been granted, when between half-past ten and eleven at night he did a few energetic dumb-bell exercises before going to bed, he claimed nothing more of the morrow than that it should be like to-day: sufficient unto the day had been the good thereof. That something should have occurred, like the felling of his favourite tree, or the unpunctuality of Miss Howard at lunch, which had caused a tantrum, would not prove to have spoiled the day; he was large-minded enough to take a broader view than that.

Plans and retrospections eddied pleasantly round in his head, the volume of Macaulay's *Essays*, already upside down, slipped from his hand, and he indulged as usual in half an hour's nap, from which the sound of the dressing gong and the entry of the maid with his hot water roused him. Here was a fine opportunity to linger before making his toilet in order to demonstrate to oth-

ers what an inconsiderate thing it was not to be punctual. But, being very hungry, he scorned so paltry a reprisal. He had not quite finished with his evening paper, for there was a leader on the coal strike which a cursory glance had shown him was written in a vein which he thoroughly approved, and he took it down with him to finish as he dined.

Colonel Chase openly used spectacles for reading when he was alone, and furtively in company, slipping them off if he thought they would be noticed, for they were a little out of keeping with that standard of perfect health and vigour of which he was so striking an example. Still they were useful with small print (print was not what it used to be, or the electric light, probably owing to the coal strike, was not so luminous) and by propping his paper against his cruet, he thought they would be unnoticed. Occasionally he glanced over the top of it at the new arrival of this afternoon who sat at a table close in front of him. She was a good-looking woman of middle age, of healthy and attractive appearance, wearing a fixed bright smile for no particular reason. She was evidently on the best terms with life, and until Colonel Chase saw that, at the conclusion of dinner, she walked out with a pronounced limp and leaned heavily on a stick, he had felt sure that she was no patient in search of health. The dining room had cleared before he finished his glass of port, and when he went out the guests, with Mrs. Oxney and Mrs. Bertram, were sitting in the lounge. This was the usual procedure: they all sat talking there till he joined them and pro-

posed the pastime which he preferred. Usually he liked playing bridge, and a table was formed; sometimes he challenged Mrs. Oxney to a game of chess, which always ended in the capture of all her pieces (for he ran no risks) and a brilliant checkmate. But before that there would generally be two or three guests trying to solve the cross-word puzzle in the evening paper, and though he invariably professed never to glance at a cross-word puzzle, his quiet work at it in his room before dinner often enabled him to help them with some wonderful extempore solutions. To-night Miss Kemp, Mrs. Oxney, and Mrs. Holders formed the cross-word group, and were sadly at a loss for nearly everything. In a corner of the lounge, away from any possible draught, Mr. Kemp had successfully cornered the new bright-smiling guest and was telling her all about Bath and Buxton and Harrogate and Aix. Mrs. Oxney, with apologies for interrupting Mr. Kemp's conversation, introduced her to Colonel Chase as Mrs. Bliss, a name which seemed to suit her excellently, and then hurriedly claimed his assistance in the puzzle.

"We shall get on better now that the colonel will help us," she said. "Such a difficult one to-night, Colonel."

Colonel Chase quite forgot that he had pencilled the greater part of this arduous puzzle into his evening paper, and put it carelessly down on the table by the particular armchair that was always reserved for him.

"I'm sure if it's difficult I sha'n't be of much use to you," he said. "I've no head for these things."

"Oh, but you're wonderful," said Mrs. Oxney. "A

town in Morocco, six letters. How is one to know that, if one's never been there? Perhaps I'd better get an atlas."

"No, no, wait a minute," said Colonel Chase. "Let's do without an atlas if we can. Let me think now. Fez? No, that's too short. Now what is that other place. It's on the tip of my tongue. Six letters, did you say? Ha! Tetuan! How will that suit you?"

A chorus of praise went up and so did Mrs. Holders's eyebrows.

"And it fits 'unicorn,' " cried Miss Kemp in ecstasy. "We should never have guessed 'Tetuan.' Then thirteen down, the Latin for southwest wind, eight letters, and if 'Tetuan's' right, which it must be because of 'unicorn,' there's an 'n' for the fifth!"

"Latin! Come, come! I've forgotten all my Latin," said this fatuous man. "If it was Hindustanee now. . . . But let me try to be a boy again. There's 'Boreas,' but that's north wind, I'm afraid, and too short for you. You've stumped me there. Wait a moment, though. Ovid: something in Ovid. I've got it. Try 'Favonius.' See if 'Favonius' will help you."

Shrill sounded the chorus of praise, because Favonius fitted "vampire" and "alpha."

"I knew you'd make short work of it, Colonel," said Mrs. Oxney. "You're a positive encyclopædia: that's what I always say of you. And what's a trigonometrical term of six letters with an 's' for the third? You ought to go in for the prizes, indeed you ought, for you'd win every one."

"Upon my word, Mrs. Oxney, you want to know a lot to-night," said he. "I must recollect my mathematics as well as my Latin, and perhaps you'll want Hebrew next. Trigonometry now: there's 'equation,' no, perhaps you'd call that algebra. But there's 'tangent,' only that's got no 's': there's 'sine' . . . ah, put down 'cosine.' 'Cosine's' right."

"Why, I never heard of such a thing," said Mrs. Oxney. "How can I guess what I've never heard of? 'Cosine!' Fancy!"

A diabolical notion, worthy only of a low mind, struck Tim Bullingdon. Colonel Chase had got up and was standing commandingly by the fireplace with his back half turned. So Tim drew his copy of the evening paper from the table and stealthily turned to the cross-word page, where he found the entire puzzle legibly pencilled in. Then he skilfully replaced the paper again and pointing to it, winked at Mrs. Holders. That ingenious lady guessed his purport and gave a little squeal of laughter which she converted into an unconvincing cough . . . So while Colonel Chase now feigned hesitation over "frieze," "crampit," and "piston," Mr. Bullingdon dreamily but fluently supplied them all. These three brilliant suggestions finished the puzzle, and the colonel, after magnanimously complimenting him on his quickness, invited the three ladies of the group to play bridge with him in the smoking room. Miss Howard, in view of her improvisation at the entertainment next week, betook herself to the piano in the drawing room to fix in her mind a few fragments of extempore melody.

Mr. Kemp meantime had been enjoying a splendid innings. He was accustomed to tell the lounge a tragic history of his left hip from March 3, 1920, to listeners over whose eyes, as the sad narrative proceeded, there often came a sort of glazed look. That, of course, never deterred him in any way from continuing, but he told it much more vividly to-night, for this bright-smiling Mrs. Bliss was full of attention and eager intent. She seemed intensely sympathetic and at the conclusion, when he had fully recounted the complete stiffening of that once mobile joint, she closed her eyes for a moment as if in prayer and her mouth grew grave. Then her bright smile returned to it in full radiance after this short eclipse.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am for you, dear Mr. Kemp," she said. "So sorry; truly sorry."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," said he. "I feel that you are one of those few who realize what martyrdom I have to go through. Most people have so little imagination. It has been a real pleasure talking to you, and to go back for a moment to that morning when first I found——"

She leaned forward, smiling more than ever.

"And shall I—may I tell you why I am so sorry for you?" she asked.

"Please do," said Mr. Kemp. An explanation seemed rather unnecessary, for it was clear that her kind and sympathetic nature accounted for that. But he was a little hoarse with talking so much and he did not mind the interruption to his reversion to "that morning."

The radiance of her smile was marvellous.

"It will surprise you," she said. "But the reason I'm

so sorry for you is that you think your left hip is stiffened and that you think you suffer all these agonies. It's a huge mistake: there's nothing whatever the matter with you, and you never have any pain at all. There isn't such a thing as pain. All is harmony, and you're perfectly well."

Mr. Kemp could hardly believe his ears: this declaration sounded merely like a coarse and unmerited insult. And yet when he looked at that radiant smile and those sympathetic eyes it was hard to believe that Mrs. Bliss intended it as such. He curbed the indignant exclamation that rose to his lips.

"What do you mean?" he said. "I've just been telling you how I got worse and worse, especially after that miscreant at Aix had been handling the joint."

"I know, and now I tell you that it's all Error. Sin and illness and pain and death are all Error. Omnipotent Mind couldn't have made them and therefore they don't exist. Nothing has any real existence except love, health, harmony, and happiness."

"But when I feel a sharp pain like a red-hot knitting needle being thrust into my hip——" began Mr. Kemp.

"Error. Omnipotent Mind governs all. All is mind, and there can be no sensation in material."

"But God bless my soul——" said Mr. Kemp.

"He does," said this astonishing lady. "Hold on to that thought and the body will utter no complaints. Dear Mr. Kemp, all belief in pain and sickness comes from Error. Therefore there is neither pain nor sickness: it is unreal and vanishes as soon as we realize its unreality.

Hence all healing comes from Mind, and not from *materia medica.*"

There was something challenging about so remarkable a statement. Mr. Kemp's head was whirling slightly (but not aching) for Mrs. Bliss seemed to skip about so, but he pulled himself together and tried, figuratively, to catch hold of her.

"But you yourself," he said. "Aren't you limping very badly and leaning on a stick? Indeed, I was going to ask you, as soon as I had finished telling you about my hip, what form of rheumatism you are suffering from."

Again that radiant smile brightened.

"I'm not suffering from any at all," she said. "Error. It is only a false claim, which I am getting rid of by right thought."

"But why did you come to Bolton then?" he asked. "Can't you think rightly at home? Haven't you come here for treatment?"

This question did not disconcert her in the slightest.

"Yes, I'm going to have a course of baths," she said, "but entirely for my dear husband's sake, who is still in blindness. I have, out of love for him, consented to do that—'bear ye one another's burdens,' you know—but what is curing me, oh, so rapidly, of this false claim of rheumatoid arthritis, as I think they call it, is my own demonstrating over it. All the way down in the train I treated myself for it, and a friend in London is going to give me absent treatment for it from ten to-night till half-past."

"Absent treatment?" asked Mr. Kemp. "What's that?"

"She will just sit and realize that there is nothing the matter with me, because there can't be anything the matter, since all is health and harmony."

"And will that make it any better?" asked Mr. Kemp.

"It cannot possibly fail to do so. It is the only true healing."

"Then perhaps you won't need your bath tomorrow," said he.

She gave the gayest of laughs.

"Of course I sha'n't need it, dear Mr. Kemp," she said. "As I told you I am only taking the treatment for my dear husband's sake. That is not really inconsistent. It is only like telling a fairy story to amuse some dear sweet child. Though such a story is not true it does not mean one is telling lies. What is curing me is the absolute knowledge that Omnipotent Mind never made suffering and never meant us to suffer. Hence, if we think we suffer, it is all a delusion or Error. It can't be real since Mind never made it."

"Dear me, it all sounds most interesting," said Mr. Kemp. "I wonder if it would do me any good."

Mrs. Bliss got up rather too briskly and the smile completely faded for a moment as a pang of imaginary pain shot through her knee. But almost instantly it reasserted itself.

"There, do you see?" she said. "Surely that will convince you. Just for a moment I allowed myself to entertain Error, but at once I denied Error, and what I

thought was pain has gone. Of course there wasn't any pain really. To-morrow I will lend you my precious, precious book, the *Manual of Mental Science,* which will prove to you that you can't have pain. What a delicious refreshing talk we've had! Now I must be off, for my friend will be giving me absent treatment, and I must be with her in spirit."

Mrs. Bliss limped slowly but smilingly away, and clinging onto the banisters, which creaked beneath her solid grasp, and leaning heavily on her stick hauled herself upstairs. She paused at the top, panting a little.

"Not a single touch of pain," she said exultantly.

Mr. Kemp was delighted to hear it, for she seemed barely able to get upstairs at all, but she must know best.

Very serious and exciting bridge meantime had been proceeding in the smoking room. The points could not be ruinous to anybody, for as usual they were threepence a hundred, and thus anyone who lost as much as a shilling was heartily condoled with by the resulting capitalist. The game itself, with its subtleties and intricacies, furnished the excitement, and Colonel Chase, of course, was the final authority on all points of play and instructed partner and adversaries alike with unstinted criticism.

"A golden rule: to draw out trumps is a golden rule," he was asserting. "They always used to say of me at the mess that I never left a trump in my opponents' hands. You lost a trick or two in the last game, partner, by neglecting that, but then our opponents were indulgent to your fault and let us off. If Mrs. Holders had led a

club after you had played your king, she and Mrs. Oxney would have got a couple more tricks and penalized us soundly."

Mrs. Holders was still feeling Bolshevistic.

"But I hadn't got a club, Colonel," she said. (This was not true, but that made no difference.)

"Ah, no: you hadn't," said he. "What I should have said was if Mrs. Oxney had led a club. That's what I meant."

"Yes, to be sure I ought to have," said Mrs. Oxney, who never had a notion what her hand contained the moment she had got rid of it.

"I think so: I think so," said Colonel Chase. "Hammer away at a suit, establish it at all costs. It pays in the end. Now let's have a look. Who dealt this?"

"I did," said Mrs. Holders. "And I pass."

"No bid, then, is what you should say. I must consider then: a difficult problem. I shall declare two hearts, partner. Two, mind: let's have no underbidding. You can trust me for having a sound reason when I say two hearts instead of one."

"Fancy! Two hearts straight off," said Mrs. Oxney. "I should never dare to do such a thing. I can do nothing against such a declaration."

"No, I expect you'll find yourselves in the Potarge this time," said Colonel Chase. "No bid, then: well, partner?"

Now Miss Kemp had got into terrible trouble last night for taking Colonel Chase out of a major suit into a minor suit, and so, though she only held two micro-

scopic hearts, but an immense tiara of diamonds, she also passed, but Mrs. Holders without a moment's hesitation was daring enough to double. This almost amounted to an impertinence, and the colonel drew himself up as if insulted: he was not accustomed to have his declaration doubled. He stared at her for a withering moment and she saw red.

"Very well, I've nothing more to say," he said. "I pass."

"You should say 'no bid,' Colonel," remarked Mrs. Holders.

Colonel Chase was a very fair-minded man when it was not reasonably possible to be otherwise.

"So I should, so I should," he said. "*Peccavi!* And I trust I am not too old to learn. No bid all round is it? And a club led by Mrs. Oxney. So let's have a look at your hand, partner. Ha, six fine diamonds! Potarge indeed. Let's get to work, and discuss our shortcomings afterward. I find it a little difficult to concentrate with so much agreeable conversation going on. A club! I'll play the queen from your hand. Some do, some don't, but I have always maintained it is the correct play."

A perfect whirlwind of disasters descended upon the unfortunate man. The queen of clubs was taken by Mrs. Holders's king, who returned it and Mrs. Oxney took it with her ace. She then pulled out a small diamond by mistake, and pleasantly found that Mrs. Holders had got none. Mrs. Holders trumped it, and led a third club. This established a very jolly cross-ruff, for wicked Mrs. Oxney had opened clubs from an ace and a small one.

"Never saw such luck," said Colonel Chase, as small trumps on each side of him secured tricks with monotonous regularity. "I can't think why you didn't take me out with two diamonds, partner."

"Because it would have required three," said Mrs. Holders.

"Indeed! Well, that would have been cheaper than letting my two hearts stand. . . . Ha! Now we'll make an end of this."

He trumped one of those wretched little clubs with the king; Mrs. Oxney, with many apologies, overtrumped with the ace.

"I never saw such bad luck, Colonel," she said. "Everything against you. Too bad! Of course it looked as if Mrs. Holders held the ace."

"I should think so indeed, considering she doubled me," said the colonel. "I can't think what you doubled me on, Mrs. Holders. The rest, I imagine, are mine. Let's see: I declared two hearts, I believe. Then we're four down. Somewhat expensive, partner, when we should have had the game if you had only declared diamonds. Well, well: we all have to pay for our experience."

"I doubled you on an excellent hand," said Mrs. Holders, "and I can't think why you declared two hearts."

Colonel Chase again stared at her. She had dared to double his declaration, she had dared to justify it, and now she dared to question his declaration. The only thing to do was to answer her quite calmly.

"Two hearts was undoubtedly the right declaration," he said. "I fancy that among experts there would be little difference of opinion about that, nor indeed about my view of what my partner should have done. I wager that if we sent the hands up to Slam and Pons I should get my verdict."

"Oh, that would be interesting," said Mrs. Oxney. "Let us do that. How exciting to see our game of bridge at Wentworth all printed in the Sunday paper. I'm sure they would say that it was very bad luck on the colonel and that he played it all quite beautifully."

The suggestion was adopted, and Mrs. Holders noted down the reconstructed hands. Colonel Chase did not seem very enthusiastic about it, though he had originated the idea, and thought it very unlikely that Slam would give his opinion in so obvious a question.

This rubber came to an immediate and sensational ending for Colonel Chase, naturally anxious to get back on Mrs. Holders's unjustifiable (though justified) double, returned the compliment next hand and thus gave his adversaries the rubber. There was indeed an air of defiance about that lady to-night, she was in a state of rebellion from established authority, and she made this even more painfully apparent by challenging his addition, and incontestably proving that he was wrong. This made Mrs. Oxney, though thereby she gained threepence more, quite uncomfortable; the colonel's arithmetic and his law-giving had both been called in question, and it was as if Moses, coming down from Sinai with the tables of commandments, had been sub-

jected to cross-examination as to their authenticity and the number of them. Moses would not have liked that, nor did Colonel Chase, and it was lucky, in Mrs. Oxney's opinion, that he opened the next rubber with a grand slam, for that smoothed down the frayed edges of his temper and he explained very carefully the brilliance and difficulty of his achievement.

"An interesting hand," he said, "and it required a bit of playing, if I may say so. That eight of spades, partner: that might have been a nasty card for us. Lucky—at least there wasn't much luck about it, only a little calculation—that I trumped it from my dummy. Some people might have discarded a diamond but I'm too old a bird to go after will-o'-the-wisps like that. The other was the correct game: played like that there wasn't another trick to be made anywhere."

He was still a little dignified with Mrs. Holders for having dared to double him and to add up the sums right and turned to her.

"Or can you suggest any plan by which I could have got another trick?" he asked.

Mrs. Holders gave a little squeal.

"Not possibly," she said. "You got all the tricks there were."

"Ah, yes: grand slam, so it was," said he. "Amusing that I should have asked you if any more tricks were to be secured."

"Very," said Mrs. Holders. "Most."

Play suddenly became slightly hectic. Even Miss

Kemp, who never bid against no-trumps because if anybody had got such a good hand as that it was no use fighting against it, developed unusual aggressiveness, and Mrs. Oxney was penalized again and again for supporting her partner's declarations without anything to support them with. The scores above the line went on mounting and mounting and even Colonel Chase got silent and preoccupied as he vainly tried to calculate how many threepences were involved on one side or the other.

Every now and then he broke into hectoring instruction but somehow with the rebellious Mrs. Holders on his right, who gave little acid smiles and elevation of her eyebrows when he told her what she ought to have played or discarded or declared and made no reply of any sort, he felt like an autocrat in the presence of some ominously silent mob, while the congratulations of Mrs. Oxney, who just now was his partner, if he fulfilled his contract, and her sympathy with his ill luck if he miserably failed, were only like the assurances of the old régime, that all was well with his czardom. He was not at all sure that all was well: he felt tremors pervading his throne; there was a cold devilish purpose about Mrs. Holders when she outbid him which was much like the edge of the assassin's knife. There was a patient deadliness about her, when having failed in her design she ambushed herself for his further declaration, that really unnerved him. Usually she succeeded in driving him into an impossible declaration, and when she failed owing to his surrender, and she was penalized herself,

she remained quite unmoved, and instead of finding fault with somebody else cheerfully entered two or three hundred against her own score.

Bridge generally finished about ten o'clock, for Wentworth with its freight of invalids was early to bed, but now half-past ten had struck and still this truculent rubber went on.

"Upon my word, most interesting," said Colonel Chase as, with slightly trembling fingers, he shuffled the cards for the next and fifteenth hand. "You let us off there, Mrs. Holders; if you had led out trumps, as I've often advised you to do, you would have caught my queen——"

"So she would," said Mrs. Oxney admiringly. "You see everything, Colonel."

"—and then you would have cleared your diamonds, and it would have been we who were in the Potarge, instead of you. Funny how a little slip like that sticks to one through the rest of——"

"Five no-trumps," said Mrs. Holders, after considering her hand for about two seconds.

Colonel Chase could not command his voice at once. But at the second attempt he mastered it.

"Come, come," he said, "you want to keep me up all night—I've never heard anybody——"

"Five no-trumps," said Mrs. Holders with extraordinary distinctness.

Colonel Chase sorted his hand and found a richness. There was a brilliant array of seven diamonds lacking the king; there were the king and queen of hearts, there

was the king of spades by himself, and he thought that with so splendid a hand this was a wonderful opportunity to give the rebellious woman a good lesson, and establish himself forever on his rightful throne. He doubled, and Mrs. Holders redoubled.

At that the jovial laugh, to the accompaniment of which Colonel Chase was preparing to say to his partner that this was Potarge for two, died in his throat, though he was far from realizing that Nemesis, who no doubt had been patiently listening to his lectures on bridge for the last month or two, was licking her hungry lips. He put down his cigarette and led the ace of diamonds. Miss Kemp displayed her hand. It contained the ace and queen of spades, the king of diamonds with an infinitesimal satellite, three clubs, including the knave, and nothing else of the slightest importance.

Mrs. Holders gave that annoying little squeal of laughter that grated on Colonel Chase's nerves and discarded a small heart on his noble ace of diamonds. Somehow that made him feel much better. Little he knew that he was destined to be much worse. But at present he felt better.

"That's the danger of declaring no-trumps with a suit missing, Mrs. Holders," he said. "I've fallen into that trap before now myself. Let me see: five, I think."

He jovially slapped the trick down.

"One more trick, partner," he said, "and then the fun begins."

"That *was* a beautiful double of yours," said Mrs. Oxney. "Wonderful!"

"Not so bad, not so bad," said he. "I'm a highwayman this time, Mrs. Holders, exacting penalties for your rashness in going unguarded."

"Quite," said Mrs. Holders in a terrible voice.

"Well, I'll just clear that king of diamonds out of the way," said Colonel Chase, "and then we'll settle down and be comfortable."

He cleared the king of diamonds out of the way and by way of retaliation Mrs. Holders cleared his king of spades out of the way with dummy's ace and continued with the queen of the same suit. Colonel Chase having no more, and being constitutionally unable to part with one of those winning diamonds, threw out a small club. Anything would do.

The colonel's jaw might have been observed by any careful bystander to drop about half an inch the moment he had done so. He saw that he had left his queen of clubs with only one guard. Perhaps he had settled down to be comfortable but nobody could possibly have guessed that. Mrs. Holders then led the knave of clubs from her partner's hand, Mrs. Oxney played something of extreme insignificance, and then Mrs. Holders sat and thought. She pulled a card out of her hand and held it poised. She put it back. She pulled out another card and played the king of clubs. The colonel played a small one.

Colonel Chase began to perspire.

Mrs. Holders pulled out a card again and put it back. A most annoying habit. Then she pulled it out again and played it. It was the ace of clubs. Colonel Chase put on the queen (it couldn't be helped), and Mrs. Oxney

discarded something pathetically unimportant in another suit.

"What? No more clubs?" said Colonel Chase in a voice of intense indignation.

"No, I wish I had," said poor Mrs. Oxney. "Isn't it bad luck? And I've got such a quantity of—oh, I suppose I mustn't say that."

"I don't mind," said Mrs. Holders, who thereupon played out the ace of hearts and followed it with two processions of winning clubs and winning spades.

Colonel Chase said "Pshaw." Cataracts of diamonds had been spouting from his hand and rivers of hearts from his partner's.

"But don't we get any more?" said Mrs. Oxney. "All my beautiful hearts and all your beautiful diamonds?"

"Fifty for a little slam," said Mrs. Holders quite calmly, though her eyebrows had almost disappeared, "and thirty for aces. Then two hundred for my contract, doubled and redoubled, and two hundred more for the extra trick, and below six times two hundred. I think that's all. Dear me!"

This was intolerable.

"Not bridge at all," said Colonel Chase. "With not a single diamond in your hand and spades headed by the knave. Madness! I would have doubled on my hand every time."

Mrs. Holders knew all that perfectly well. She knew also (and knew that Colonel Chase knew) that if he had not unguarded his queen of clubs . . . But then he had and she went on adding up.

"And two is seven," she said, "and eight is fifteen, and six is twenty-one, and seven is twenty-eight, and seven is thirty-five, and six is forty-one and carry four, and two and three and five is fourteen and four is eighteen——"

"Yes, I make that," said Miss Kemp, licking her pencil, "and oh, just look at the hundreds!"

After they had sufficiently looked at the hundreds the general reckoning disclosed that Colonel Chase had to pay everybody all round, and he disbursed sums varying from threepence to Mrs. Oxney up to the staggering figure of three and ninepence due to Miss Kemp. All the evenings on which everybody had paid to him were forgotten in general commiseration and nobody dreamed of consoling him with the encouragement he often administered to others, and told him that his game was improving so much that very likely he would win it all back again. Mrs. Oxney could scarcely be induced to accept her threepence, and she had to steel herself to the sacrifice by the glad hope that she would lose ten times that sum to him to-morrow. On other nights Colonel Chase usually stood for a long time in front of the fireplace when the rubbers were over, richly rattling coppers in his trousers pocket, and giving them a few hints about declarations to take up to bed; but now there was no chink of bullion to ratify his wisdom, and he made as short work of his glass of whisky and water (called "grog" or "nightcap") as he had made of the crossword, and left the victors on the field of battle. Miss Kemp gave him time to get upstairs, in order to avoid the indelicacy of seeing a gentleman open his bedroom

door and perhaps disclose pajamas warming by the fire, and then followed him in some haste, since her father (there was no indelicacy about that) always expected her to come and talk to him, when he had got to bed, about his evening symptoms, or read to him till he felt sleepy. She knew she was unusually late to-night and it was possible that he had punished her by already putting out his light. This pathetic proceeding, he was sure, wrung her with agonies of remorse.

No such severity had been inflicted to-night: he was sitting up in bed with a book in front of him and a fur tippet belonging to Florence round his neck for the protection of the glands of the throat. On the table beside him was the thermos flask filled with hot milk, in case he felt undernourished during the night, the glass jug of lemonade made with saccharine instead of sugar, in case he felt thirsty, and the clock with the luminous hands.

"I am late, Papa, I'm afraid," she said. "We had a most exciting rubber which would not come to an end."

His face wore its most martyred expression: he glanced at the clock which showed the unprecedented hour of eleven.

"Surely my clock is fast," he said.

"No, it is eleven," she said. "Shall I read to you?"

"Far too late; far, far too late. I shall be good for nothing in the morning as it is."

"You would like to go to sleep then?" she asked. "Shall I put out your light?"

"Indeed, I should very much like to go to sleep," he said, "but it is already long past my usual hour for going

to sleep, and, as you know, if I am not asleep by eleven, I often lie awake half the night. No doubt you were absorbed in your game and could not spare a thought to me. Very natural. Two hours' bridge! I was wrong to expect that perhaps it would occur to you—but no matter!"

"Would you like me to talk to you then, if you don't feel you'll go to sleep?" she asked.

"Perhaps a little talk might compose me," said he, "if you can spare me ten minutes. I am very tired tonight, and that makes me wakeful. I have had a great deal to do. My thermos flask was unfilled and I had to ring. There were no rusks in my little tin and I had to get out the big tin and fill it. My clock was not wound."

Florence sat down by his bed. Her chair grated on the margin of boards as she pulled it forward and he winced.

"You've got everything now, haven't you?" she asked.

"Yes. I saw to everything myself. Talk to me, please. Yes?"

"I won three and ninepence," said Florence. "Colonel Chase lost to everybody."

"I heard him thumping by just now," said her father. "I supposed he had lost for he banged his door. I was just beginning to get sleepy. A want of consideration, perhaps. Yes?"

At each interrogative "yes," as Florence knew, a fresh topic of interest had to be furnished.

"Mrs. Oxney won threepence," she said.

"I am glad. Perhaps she will be able to afford me

hot water in my bottle to-morrow. It was tepid to-night. I think you have told me enough about your game of bridge. Yes?"

"Miss Howard is playing at an entertainment in the Assembly Rooms next week."

"I will not go," said Mr. Kemp with some heat. "I do not see why I should be expected to turn out in the evening. Yes?"

Florence felt the swift oncoming of a sneeze. She fumbled in her bag for a handkerchief and rattled richly among the nine coppers. Several violent explosions followed and when the spasm subsided she found her father spraying the air round him with his flask of disinfectant.

"Perhaps it would be wiser if you sat a little farther off," he said. "Yes?"

"I don't think anything else has happened," said Florence wheezily. "Oh, yes, that new arrival Mrs. Bliss. I saw you talking to her. How she smiles! I wonder why."

Mr. Kemp showed the first sign of withdrawing the blight he had been casting on his commandeered conversation.

"She told me strange things," he said. "I could make little of them, though I must confess they interested me. She said I was perfectly well and that pain had no real existence. To say that to me of all people appears on the face of it to be the gibbering of a lunatic. Yet as she talked I certainly did begin to feel that there was something behind it. She told me also that she was perfectly well, though I have never seen anybody limp more

heavily. I scarcely think that I was as bad as that after my terrible experience at Aix. I thought she would hardly be able to get upstairs yet she called to me from the landing, though much out of breath, that she had not felt a single twinge. Her theory is that all pain is an illusion or a delusion, I forget which, and if you only deny it, it vanishes. Ever since I came up to bed, which is a long time ago now, I have been denying it and I think—I am not sure, but I think—that I am lying a little more easily to-night than I have done since last Monday. But I must not get too much interested in it at this hour."

Mr. Kemp yawned as he spoke.

"I am beginning to get a little drowsy," he said. "I will not talk any more. Please go out very quietly and turn off my light from the switch by the door. Don't bang it."

Florence tiptoed away to her room: though it was late, she felt wakeful and exhilarated. She had enjoyed her bridge, but it was not that alone, nor her unusually long remission from her father, nor yet the load of bullion that clinked in her bag which accounted for it. The evening had been adventurous, for Mrs. Holders had fluttered the red flag in the face of that formidable autocrat, Colonel Chase: she had called in question the wisdom of his declaration, she had backed her own opinion by doubling, she had invoked the decision of Slam. And no retribution had followed, no thunderbolt had split her: the colonel had merely paid up all round and gone to bed.

Florence wound up her watch and looked at her

plump and rather pleasing image in her glass. Her hair was cropped like a man's and parted at the side; she wore a stiff linen collar with a small black tie in a bow, and a starched shirt with a sort of Eton jacket; her skirt was about the same length as the jacket. Then crossing her legs in an easy attitude she sat down on her bed and thought carefully over what had been happening this evening. It was an application of Mrs. Holders's defiance, rather than the defiance itself, that claimed her attention. For Wentworth in general dumbly travailed under the domination of the colonel and if three hours ago she had been asked what she supposed would happen if anyone questioned his rulings and his bawlings and his tuitions, her imagination would have failed to picture so impossible a contingency. Yet the impossible had now occurred and nothing had happened. The application was obvious and she found herself wondering what would happen if she questioned her father's right to immolate her day and night on the altar of his aches. Daring though such a supposition was, would nothing particular happen?

Florence let the hypochondriac history of the last seven years, from the time when her father had seriously taken up the profession of invalidism, instead of having no profession at all, spread itself panoramically out in front of her. Her mother was alive then and for those first two years of this lean series the three of them had trodden the unceasing circle of hydropathic establishments. Buxton, Bath, Harrogate, and Bolton (but never Aix again) had grown to be the cardinal points of the

year, and these in turn were followed by Torquay, Cromer, Scarborough, and Bournemouth for the after-cure of bracing air or sunny climate. At first they had returned to the pleasant little flat in Kensington Square after their quarterly cures to wait for the next cardinal point to come round, but her father, who was in his element in boarding houses with all their grand opportunities of telling relays of strangers about his ailments, soon discovered that London did not suit him, for it was airless in the summer, treacherous in the autumn and spring, and foggy in the winter; and now he and Florence remained at Torquay, Cromer, Scarborough, and Bournemouth till the next cure. After two years of this preposterous existence her mother, who had always been frail and anæmic, simply came to the end of her vitality, and exhausted by her husband's vampirism had stopped living. She had been possessed of a considerable fortune, half of which, with the flat in Kensington Square, she had left to Florence absolutely, the remainder to her husband for life. This appeared to him the most ungrateful return for all the care he had allowed her to take of him, and until his own health had completely driven all other interests from his mind he had sedulously nursed this grievance. Since then, for five years, Florence had been his enslaved companion.

She knew well that her interminable ministries to him were not performed out of the bounty of love but from her own acquiescence in being crushed, and now it struck her that she thoroughly disliked him. Though she had not definitely stated that to herself before, the

emotion must have been habitual, for its discovery did not in the least shock her, nor did it shock her to conjecture that he equally disliked her. Probably all these years he would have been happier with a trained nurse, who was paid for being bullied and bored, and she herself could have lived instead of merely getting older. She might even have married, for women did not become certified spinsters at the age of thirty, as she was when her solitary gyration with him began; but the idea of marriage had hitherto seemed very embarrassing to her virginal soul. No man alive could justly claim to have raised the beat of her placid blood by a single pulsation: she had no spark of envy for any woman however happily married, compared with one who had her liberty. Miss Howard, for instance, seemed to her to live an almost ideal existence: she went where she liked, nobody could claim her time or her energies, she tripped and sang about the passages, so sunlit to her was the normal hour, she devoted herself to her painting and her piano, the pursuits she adored, and had no bond-slave duties to anybody. Happy Miss Howard, gifted and accomplished and free! And how handsome she was! What a charm and vivacity! Though Florence had never experienced any sort of tenderness for a man, she sometimes thought of Miss Howard with a sort of shy sentimental yearning.

There had been moments, rare and swiftly vanishing, when Florence had seen freedom gleaming on the far horizon, for in the sad hydropathic round her father sometimes made friends with suitable and sympathetic

females, especially those who had sitting rooms and maids and motors, and once or twice it had really looked as if something was coming of it. He was remarkably handsome with his fine aquiline face, his thick gray hair, and tall slim figure, and she was sure that middle-aged spinsters and widows had given him and received from him very promising attention. She knew well the symptoms on his side, for when such friendship was ripening he adopted an attitude of wistful and tender affection toward herself, he would pat her hand (when the lady was by), and ask her what she had been doing, and thank her for being so devoted to her poor old papa. But nothing had ever come of it; the lady who seemed within an ace of becoming her poor old mamma had got some glimpse, Florence supposed, of his unique selfishness and had escaped from the glamour . . .

She was ready for bed now, and still under the inspiration of the revolt which Mrs. Holders had made against the authority and omniscience of Colonel Chase, she asked herself what would happen, actually happen, if she refused to be eternally dragged about from spa to spa. Naturally she could not throw off so chronic a yoke with one comprehensive gesture of defiance; she would have to begin gently and say, for instance, tomorrow morning, that she was going out for a walk instead of coming down to the baths with him in the bus, and then after doing various chemical errands for him, sitting in the waiting room which faintly smelled of the awful effluvia of the waters, till he was ready to drive up again. Perhaps, if she could summon up nerve, she

might ask Miss Howard if she might help her to carry her satchel and stool to the scene of her sketch. As she quenched her light she heard through the door which communicated with her father's room a sound so regular and sonorous that, if he had not been sure he was going to lie awake for hours, she would certainly have thought he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER III

THE warmth and clemency of October, which till now had been so pleasant and had permitted Miss Howard to make so many notable sketches of noon and evening and night without the risk of catching a chill, completely collapsed during the dark hours, and piercing blasts from the northeast with volleys of half-frozen rain rattled on the windows of Wentworth. Colonel Chase, who often attributed much of his magnificent robustness to the fact that he always slept with his window wide open, top and bottom, had a most alarming dream that Mrs. Holders, with whom he was playing bridge in a restaurant car on a train which was oscillating very much, laid an odd-looking card resembling the ace of hearts, yet somehow different from it, on the table and said: "That card gives me the rubber doubled and redoubled." As she spoke the oscillation increased and the card began to give out sharp reports, and he woke to find his blind blowing out horizontally into the room and cracking like a whip, while the solid walls of Wentworth trembled in the gale. He jumped out of bed, and at the risk of undermining his health by closing the window, shut and bolted it. Mr. Kemp was more fortunate, for knowing that the night air was poison to him he always slept with his windows closed, shuttered, and curtained.

But even so, the driven sleet awoke him, and observing by his luminous clock that it was a quarter-past two, took a cup of hot milk and a rusk. Warmed and comforted he turned over in bed without a single twinge from his left hip, which was so surprising that he lay awake a long time and wondered whether it was Mind. Soot poured down Mrs. Holders's chimney, but she could not help that and instantly went to sleep again.

The gale had not abated when the guests began to assemble for breakfast. Sleet still rapped at the panes and the house was bitterly cold, for who, wailed Mrs. Oxney, could have expected so sudden and diabolical a change of weather? As soon as she got down she ordered wood fires to be lit in lounge and dining room and smoking room, for coal must be husbanded as long as the strike continued, and sent the gardeners to kindle the furnace of the central heating. But the dining room certainly was like an ice house at breakfast: Miss Howard's hand shook as she poured the milk over her porridge, Mr. Kemp sent Florence upstairs to get a rug for his knees, and Colonel Chase, in an appalling temper, put on a cap, which he pulled down over his ears, a long woolly muffler, and a greatcoat. He did not really feel cold but it was only right that Mrs. Oxney should be filled with remorse at not having foreseen the change, and having omitted to have the central heating put on in anticipation of it. Seeing that she was looking at him he turned up his coat collar and gave several painful coughs.

The only exception to these suffering breakfasters

was Mrs. Bliss. She was limping very badly and it took her a long time to sidle round the corner of her table and, leaning heavily on it, to sit down, but throughout the whole of this apparently agonizing process she had a bright smile and salutations right and left. She was wearing quite a thin blouse and no jacket, but when Mr. Kemp, seeing that there was a reddish tinge on her nose, a bluish tinge round her mouth, and that her hands were deadly white, said that she would surely get double pneumonia, being so lightly clad on such a bitter morning, she protested she had never been so warm and comfortable.

"And what a beautiful day it is going to be!" she said, as the gusts rattled at the window. "And such a refreshing shower! The gray rain clouds on the hills, driven along by the breeze, looked so lovely as I was dressing."

Her teeth chattered slightly as she spoke but she fixed them in a piece of hot roll.

"But it's a terrible gale," said Mr. Kemp. "I am not sure that I shall go down to the baths at all. I do not know what it is wisest to do. Perhaps if I wore my fur coat and had a hot-water bottle ready for my return I might venture. See to that, please, Florence."

"Ah, then I did hear the sound of wind during the night," said Mrs. Bliss. "That was it! A beautiful rushing noise. But I slept so well I was hardly conscious of it and awoke so happy and glowing and fresh."

"Either the woman's mad or she's got Esquimaux blood," muttered Colonel Chase as he listened to these

remarkable views. He put his hand on the stock of so-called hot-water pipes close to his chair, and withdrew it hurriedly.

"Stone cold," he observed to Miss Howard. "Disgraceful! Pipes as cold as that would keep any room cool in the height of summer."

Mrs. Oxney, who had been cheered by Mrs. Bliss's impressions of the morning, overheard this, as she was indeed meant to do, and felt miserable again. She got up, her appetite completely ruined by these scathing observations, and went over to the colonel's table, with a wretched attempt at cheerfulness.

"Oh, but the pipes will soon be hot, Colonel," she said. "My sister's gone out to see about the furnace herself, and I promise you they sha'n't spare the coke. That sudden change took us all by surprise. But I've had fires lit everywhere, and we shall soon all be cozy again. . . . Good-morning, Mrs. Bliss; and you slept well, I heard you say."

Mrs. Bliss beamed on her.

"Beautifully! So comfortable! And so enjoying my breakfast! Delicious! And the rain is clearing. I shall have such a refreshing walk down to the baths, and up again!"

Mr. Kemp was thrilled at this astounding programme. Was she sane, he wondered, or was it Mind? Or was she (in another sense) a mental case? Here, anyhow, was this smiling lady who, in spite of blue lips, said she felt warm in this refrigerating dining room, and who made slow sad work about traversing the smooth

level of its floor, intended to walk down and up the steep hill between Wentworth and the pickling establishment. It was a good half mile each way and he would have considered himself hale and hearty again if he had been able to accomplish so arduous a feat. He had visions of Mrs. Bliss falling in front of the wheels of a motor as she crossed the road, or dying of exposure as she pursued her way, with those minute and halting steps and frequent stoppages, through this sleet-sown blizzard. That would have annoyed him, as he wanted to hear more about Mind and its methods. He intervened with some agitation.

"Better not, far better not, Mrs. Bliss," he said. "The baths which can be so remedial are very fatiguing: my doctor, and I'm sure yours, recommends the minimum of physical exertion while the course is going on. I avoid all physical fatigue while I am here."

She laughed merrily.

"Dear Mr. Kemp," she said, "you still think that you are an invalid, whereas I know that I am in perfect health and harmony. Did you demonstrate last night, reminding yourself that all is Mind?"

Mr. Kemp remarked the singular fact of his having turned over without a twinge: all those twinges which he suffered as he dressed had expunged it. He had finished his breakfast and nodded to Florence to indicate that she might go away, for he wanted to pursue last night's subject, and though he would have welcomed any conviction that he was well, he did not want Florence to get hold of that idea first, or his thermos flask might

be left permanently empty and his smaller tin for rusks unreplenished. But Florence, with the fumes of last night's revolutionary debauch still lingering in her brain, paid no attention to this familiar signal.

"If you've finished your breakfast, Florence," he said, "you will kindly go upstairs and bring down my hat and coat, fur coat I think, so that I shall be ready to start. Galoshes of course. And a hot-water bottle when I get back."

Florence waved a minute red flag. This was beginning gently.

"Presently, Papa," she said, "there is plenty of time."

Mr. Kemp was naturally very much shocked at this answer, for never before, to the best of his knowledge, had Florence shown such mutinous independence, and his staring at her, with deep disfavour, which usually had so subduing an effect, proved on this occasion to have none. Instead of hurrying away she turned to Mrs. Bliss.

"Do go on telling my father about illness being a delusion," she said. "It would be lovely if you could convince him of it."

Mrs. Bliss was delighted to do so, nothing could possibly be easier than to convince anybody of a self-evident proposition, but owing to the apparently piercing cold of the dining room, they adjourned to the lounge. The two victims of this tiresome delusion concerning rheumatic joints were for the moment so completely taken in by it that they took a long while to hobble along the slippery parquet, and Florence certainly saved Mrs.

Bliss from the delusion of falling down. When they got there they found that this gale was causing the chimney to behave as if it were upside down, and clouds of pungent wood smoke came pouring out of it. Mr. Kemp then suffered from the further delusion that wood smoke was very trying to the eyes, and sat with his handkerchief over them, though Mrs. Bliss, with the tears pouring from her cheeks, asserted that she felt no inconvenience whatever from it. Her immunity served as an excellent text for her homily, and while Florence and her father, as if overcome with emotion, held their pocket handkerchiefs before their eyes, she told them how wood smoke could not possibly have any effect on those who realized that all was harmony in Omnipotent Mind.

As if to indorse her words, the chimney began to draw better, and having surreptitiously wiped away her tears she told them to put down their handkerchiefs and calmly but finally deny the return of that stinging sensation. Sure enough, they found that they had been the victim of Error.

There was still a considerable apparent lack of harmony in the conditions outside when the omnibus came round to take the patients to the baths, for it seemed to be pelting with rain, and Mrs. Bliss consented to be driven down though she still said that she would much have enjoyed the walk. But her husband, for whose sake she was undergoing this quite unnecessary cure, would not have liked the thought that she was exposing herself to this odious weather (though the weather, whatever it might be, could not hurt anybody) and with the loving

thought of him in her mind, she consented to be well wrapped up and hoisted into the omnibus. As there was no chance of helping Miss Howard with her sketching things, Florence abandoned the contemplated revolt of refusing to go down to the baths with her father, and Mrs. Bliss lent her the *Manual of Mental Science* to read while she was waiting. She could give her father absent treatment while he was being pickled.

The joint exertions of Mrs. Bertram and the gardener had sent rivers of hot water roaring through the central-heating apparatus, and Colonel Chase, sitting in the smoking room, found himself reluctantly compelled to discard his cap, muffler, and greatcoat. Any idea of breaking fresh records on his bicycle was out of the question on so stormy a morning, for the roads, even if the rain stopped, would be a mere muddy liquefaction, and the hours till lunch time had to be passed indoors. On days like these he always felt that Nature had fixed her malignant eye on him and was vomiting from the skies these innumerable gallons of cold water with the sole and express purpose of making the roads impossible for his bicycle. A materialist might hold that she was pursuing the inexorable logic of physical laws, but he knew that did not fully account for a wet morning. And then, too, just because it was wet the paper contained nothing of interest: even the criminal classes seemed to have joined in the conspiracy against him, for there was no news of brutal murders or other interesting crimes which might while away the hours for him. As for the coal strike he was sick of it, and despaired of the

government taking the line he had always maintained they should and sending the miners back to the pits whether they liked it or not.

He threw down the paper in disgust and moved his chair a little farther from the pyramid of logs which was roaring up the chimney, but this brought him closer to the hot-water pipes, which were now almost as fervent as the fire. But there was positively nowhere else to sit except in the smoking room, for the lounge was draughty, and Miss Howard was making music, if you could call it music, in the drawing room. Up and down the piano she went with trills and scales and shakes and roulades: Mrs. Oxney ought really to ask her not to play on a wet morning, when other people were housebound, for there was no getting away from that irritating tinkle. How could a man read his paper with that going on? It was as distracting as when people insisted on talking while playing bridge. If he ever decided to offer some presentable middle-aged woman the chance of looking after him and sharing his name it must be distinctly understood that she must not play the piano except in some remote room. He wondered whether there was some such withdrawn boudoir at Miss Howard's little place in Kent near Tunbridge Wells.

The thought of bridge suggested more disagreeable reflections. Last night's game had been very expensive and it had disclosed, he thought, a very ugly spirit. Several times Mrs. Holders had made a direct frontal attack on his most authoritative manœuvres. She had doubled when he had declared two hearts, openly say-

ing that he had a very good reason for it, she had told him (him!) that he ought to say "no bid" instead of "pass." She had redoubled his double of her impossible declaration, and the damned woman had been right, if you could call it right, every time. Certainly he would not ask her to play with him to-night: he would get Mrs. Bertram to take her place, though Mrs. Bertram had an agonizing habit of at once leading out any ace she happened to hold, in order to make sure of it; or, if she was exhorted not to be so insanely prodigal, of refusing to play any ace till it was quite certain to be trumped. But no woman, so he often thought, had any head for cards; the finesse and subtlety of the game was beyond them and Miss Howard was wise in refusing to play at all. He wished her refusal to play had extended to the use of the piano.

A glint of watery sunlight gleamed on the hot-water pipes; the rain had ceased and though bicycling was impossible, Colonel Chase resolved to go out for a good tramp with the pocket pedometer. The morning was a miserable time unless you were out of doors, for without strenuous exercise then you could not rest after lunch, and as for reading in the morning, what was to be done with the hours after tea, if you had read all the morning? Only a bookworm could manage two spells of reading a day, and he thanked God he was not that. Besides, that infernal tinkling from the piano was enough to put reading out of the question.

He adjusted his pedometer to zero and shouldering his mackintosh went briskly down the hill into the town.

He turned into the waiting room at the bath establishment, though he had no right there, since it was provided for patients waiting for their baths and friends waiting for patients, but there was no chance of Colonel Chase being challenged by the attendants. Far more likely that they would appreciate the honour he did the management by looking at the notice board which advertised current and coming diversions. Among these was the announcement of the entertainment in aid of the Children's Hospital, and he observed with pain that Miss Howard had "kindly consented" to give an improvisation on the piano.

Miss Kemp was sitting near, waiting for her father and absorbed in some book, but Colonel Chase gave so loud a snort of indignation at this information that she looked up with a start.

"Improvisation indeed!" he scornfully observed. "Why, Miss Howard has been practising her improvisation, so as to get it by heart, ever since breakfast! Drove me out of the house. 'Kindly consented,' too! I wish she'd kindly consent to leave the piano alone. Humbug!"

Florence put her finger on the line she was reading and sprang to arms at this monstrous attack on her adored.

"I think it's wonderfully kind of her," she said, "and I look forward to it as the greatest treat. And how on earth do you know that she's going to play at the entertainment what she is practising now? That's a pure invention."

Colonel Chase was considerably startled by this sudden fierceness.

"Well, it's the same old tune that she's been hammering at ever since I came to Wentworth," he said.

Florence felt that her indignation was not quite in tune with the spirit of mental science which she had been studying. Poor Colonel Chase had a false claim of malice, which should be treated just like a false claim of pain. Neither malice nor pain had any real existence and must be denied. She began to smile like Mrs. Bliss.

"Such lovely tunes," she said. "So sweet and harmonious and refreshing."

But Colonel Chase was clearly out of harmony.

"Makes a sort of tickling noise in my head, if you mean that," he said. "Well, I'm off for a tramp. No possibility of bicycling through this mud."

Florence continued to smile.

"How you'll enjoy your walk!" she said. "And the sun is coming out gloriously."

Colonel Chase had not been far wrong in his cynical reflections, for Miss Howard was busy over what might be called memorizing her improvisation for next week. It would be nice to begin with a few slow minor chords, all her own (or indeed anybody else's), and an impressive pause so that the audience would certainly think that something very tragic and funereal was to follow and would be pleasantly surprised when instead there came a gay chromatic run up to the very top of the piano and halfway down again and a long butterfly shake which ushered in a few bars of a waltz of Chopin's and

a quantity more of her own composition. Never had her fingers been more agile and delicate, there was not a hitch or a stumble anywhere, and Mrs. Oxney, adding up the laundry book in her sitting room next door, felt sure that Miss Howard would get an encore, if that was part of her improvisation. Then the waltz rhythm ceased and something very swoony and mysterious succeeded: it was as if the dancers (so Miss Howard thought to herself) had left the gay and brilliant ballroom, and were walking about moonlit glades in miserable and melancholy reverie. She had to play this section of the improvisation several times over, for there were some quite unexpected efforts in it which surprised her by their beauty and she must make sure of these. The pensive mood became more solemn yet, and the dancers seemed to sing a sort of chorale in a minor key which Miss Howard had composed last summer when suffering from toothache. She could not quite remember the last line of it, but she had written it down and could easily perfect herself in that. A pause again followed, during which the final chord of the chorale was struck four times very softly and nobody could tell what would happen next, indeed Miss Howard wished she knew herself. A long shake, however, must be introduced rather high up on the piano, while the left hand played arpeggios up from the very bottom, crossed the shake without disturbing it and came down again, for that was one of her most remarkable effects. She could go on playing these forever, but since they were clearly leading up to something they must come to an end, and make way for

what they were introducing. Then she remembered that she had not put in any of those passages of octaves yet, in which the butterfly's place was taken by a powerful hammer, and she began playing octaves with both hands up and down, on black notes and white alike, with increasing speed and crescendo, and still she wondered what would happen next, and so did Mrs. Oxney, who sat over the laundry book next door open mouthed at this surprising vigour and brilliancy. Then Miss Howard suddenly saw the way clear and swooped back into the Chopin waltz. Then bang, whack, bump: three enormous chords brought the improvisation to an end. Allowing for the repetition of the swoony section it had lasted just ten minutes, which would do nicely.

Miss Howard got up and, hearing in her imagination rounds of enthusiastic applause, smiled and bowed to the delighted audience, just to see what it felt like. It seemed that they quite refused to be content with what she had played them and insisted on an encore. She sat down again and pressed her fingers to her eyes (a gesture that she must remember) as if wondering what little morsel to give them next. They clearly wanted something more from the same mine, and she ran her hands delicately over the keys, still considering. Perhaps those little variations on "Tipperary" which she had so often played would be suitable, but there was no need to practise them, for she was absolutely note-perfect in this improvisation. She just ran through them for the pleasure of hearing them again.

She went through the main improvisation four or five

times more and then putting on her rings again went to the window. It was fine, though clearly too cold for sketching, but a short brisk walk would be pleasant after all this concentration and she went down into the town with the intention of paying for the frame of Evening Bells, but with the real object of seeing if the advertisement of the entertainment was displayed yet.

As she tripped along she hummed over the more vocal parts of her piece and visualized her hands performing octaves and arpeggios. She must get them so familiar that she would not have the slightest apprehension of not being able to produce them unerringly.

She paused opposite the bath establishment, and there was the notice prominently exhibited, and "Pianoforte Solo (improvisation) by Miss Alice Howard" in very gratifying type came fourth on the programme. The church choir of St. Giles's was to open with some glees, then Mr. Graves, the amusing masseur, was down for "Stories," then the Reverend H. Banks (vicar) was to sing, and her item followed. After that the choir sang again, and Dr. Dobbs did some conjuring tricks, and the Reverend H. Banks sang again, and Mrs. Banks played a violin solo ("Salut d'Amour") and the Reverend H. Banks recited "Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night," and there was a performing dog and various other rich items followed by a collection and carriages at ten. Miss Howard read this through twice, pausing at the fourth item, and then her eye was caught by another advertisement. This was to say that the Green Salon at the baths, suitable for private parties or picture exhibitions, could

be hired at a very reasonable sum by the evening or the week or longer periods.

Miss Howard felt very like all the Muses rolled into one accomplished incarnation that morning, and she thought of the stacks of sketches blushing unseen in her portfolios. Her improvisation still rang in her ears, just opposite her was the façade of the bath establishment which she had depicted in her Healing Springs, and a textile company in which she had quite a number of shares had that morning announced a bonus distribution of unexpected size: thus she felt rich as well as artistic. Inquiries about the Green Salon, she saw, were to be made of Town Councillor Bowen, at whose shop Evening Bells had been framed, and she determined, at the least, to make them, and, at the most, to take the Green Salon (suitable for picture exhibitions) for a fortnight. She knew the room: it was close to the office where patients purchased their tickets for the baths and was thus very conveniently placed, for many of them surely would be tempted to look while they were waiting for their baths. Moreover it was not too large: forty or fifty water colours, which she could easily select from her store, would be sufficient, tastefully spaced to decorate it and to display themselves to the highest advantage. The walls, which might be supposed to be green, could equally well be described as gray, and would furnish a suitably neutral background.

Town Councillor Bowen was attending to his municipal duties and was not at home, but Mrs. Town Councillor was, and she beamed respectfully at Miss How-

ard as she paid a ten-shilling note for the framing of Evening Bells over the counter and waited for change.

"And I declare I oughtn't to charge you anything at all, Miss Howard," observed this most polite lady, "for it's a pleasure to frame your beautiful pictures. Mr. Bowen was touching up the gilding himself with his own hands, and though he knew his dinner was ready, he stood there a-looking and a-looking at the work of art, till I called out, 'George, come along, do, for your chop's getting cold.' Evening Bells! I wish everybody who's fretting and worrying could have a good look at Evening Bells, for it would make them all feel peaceful again, I'm sure. And half a crown and a florin makes ten."

This little speech seemed to Miss Howard to be nothing less than a "leading." She was instantly led, after a modest cough or two.

"I see the Green Salon can be hired by the week, Mrs. Bowen," she said, "and that put it into my head that I might hold a little exhibition of my paintings. A few people, as you're so kind to suggest, might perhaps care to glance at them."

Mrs. Bowen turned up her eyes to the ceiling as if in mute thanksgiving.

"Well, that would be kind of you," she said. "As I was saying to Mr. Bowen only the other day—— But never mind that! What a treat for us all. I'm sure I shall be walking round the Green Salon morning, noon, and night. And the terms are so moderate, and nothing to pay for lighting, as the Establishment closes at five,

while there's still sufficient daylight to see pictures. Let me see, what did Mr. Bowen say they asked? I declare I forget, but I know you'll find it most moderate. As for the hanging of them, I'll be there with a hammer and nails myself, and think it a privilege. And when would you be meaning your exhibition to commence? Such a treat for everybody."

There was no reason why it should not open as soon as Mr. Bowen could frame the exhibits, and Miss Howward promised to select these at once. The Bolton *Gazette,* of which Mr. Bowen was one of the proprietors, would advertise it on most reasonable terms, and unless Miss Howard wanted to put it in the London papers, so that her friends might run down, there would practically be no other expense beyond the wages of an attendant (and no doubt the bath establishment would let Miss Howard employ one of the uniformed pages), and the charges of a catalogue, which could be typewritten for a song. Mrs. Bowen would see to that and to the list of prices, if Miss Howard was intending to let the public purchase her beautiful works of art. And of course some small red stars, adhesive stars to affix to those which were sold and prevent disappointment. Such a run there would be on them, Mrs. Bowen opined.

There was no resisting such a rosy statement and, this agreeable conversation over, Miss Howard hurried back to the baths, in order to catch the omnibus for Wentworth and begin making her selection without wasting a moment. Another reason for haste was that the clearing of the weather seemed only temporary and thick fat

clouds promising an imminent deluge were blowing up.

The omnibus was waiting and just as Miss Howard arrived, Mrs. Bliss came out of the ladies' corridor, wreathed in smiles and supported on sticks.

"Such a lovely bath, Miss Howard, so salt and refreshing and exhilarating. And how I look forward to my walk home on this breezy morning! Are you walking too? Mr. Kemp was thinking of it, but he is not quite sure. What a pleasant party we shall be if we all stroll up together."

The door of the waiting room opened and Mr. Kemp came out leaning on Florence's arm.

"Yes, my dear, I've been denying it as hard as ever I can," he said. "But I know I should never be able to get up the hill. Ah, there's Mrs. Bliss. What do you advise, Mrs. Bliss? Just now every step is agony or, if it isn't really agony, it is something so like that nobody could tell the difference. All the same it isn't quite so bad as it was yesterday, I'm sure of that. I walked all the way down the passage from my bath to the waiting room without holding onto the wall. That's something, you know. It's more than I've done for the last week."

Mrs. Bliss staggered toward him.

"Don't force it, dear Mr. Kemp," she said. "If you feel like that you had better go up in the bus, but keep on telling yourself that you would walk double the distance without a single twinge of pain. Hold onto Mind and you won't want to hold onto the wall."

"Are you going to walk?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I gave myself treatment all the time I was

in my bath. It produced such a feeling of buoyancy I'm sure I should have floated on the water if my attendant had not put little wooden bars across me to keep me down."

Mr. Kemp became materialistic for a moment.

"Oh, everyone does that," he said. "It's the brine."

Mrs. Bliss of course knew that this buoyancy was the effect of right thought and reliance on Mind, and assured Mr. Kemp that he would very soon get to know that too. Then, as all the others seemed to think they were lame, or were afraid of getting wet, though getting wet could not possibly hurt anybody, she grasped her sticks and with a loving smile at the black and menacing clouds limped slowly away. The omnibus whizzed up the hill to Wentworth and, just as they arrived, there burst a glacial storm of sleet; it was decided to send the omnibus back instantly to pick up Mrs. Bliss, who if she ever got to the top of the hill at all would be soaked and frozen. But it had hardly started when she drove up in a taxi and came radiantly into the lounge.

"I was having such a lovely walk," she said, "quite free from any false claim of pain, and so much enjoying the freshness, when a taxi drove by. The man stopped and asked if I would not take him, as he had had no fare all the morning. So I popped in, just to please him. A sweet little drive—so cozy!"

The patients dispersed to their rooms for the prescribed hour's rest after their baths. Though Mrs. Bliss said that she was not going to rest at all but just lie quiet on her bed and do an hour's strenuous work deny-

ing illness and pain, there was a superficial resemblance between her procedure and that of the others, for they all lay on bed or sofa and kept quiet. Mrs. Holders rather acidly remarked that Mrs. Bliss would soon deny having had a bath at all.

Miss Howard equally scorned the idea of rest. She ran through the improvisation again in order to fix one or two of the more elusive passages in her mind and then began the work of selection for her exhibition. There were several fat portfolios full of sketches to choose from and the difficulty at first seemed to be to know what to reject rather than which to choose, for they were all up to the same standard of execution. As she spaced them out on her bed and her washing stand and her table and her chimney piece and finally, such was their profusion, on her carpet, other difficulties presented themselves, and especially when she considered her catalogue. There were, for instance, nine pictures of St. Giles's Church, of which the famous Evening Bells was one. Should she group them together under the collective title of "Some Aspects of St. Giles's Church"? That was prosaic but on the other hand if she called them Evening Bells and Lengthening Shadows and Morning Sunshine and Reflections (alluding to the river), and God's Acre (alluding to the churchyard) people might, in a carping spirit, say that they all represented the same thing. It would be better not to have so many pictures of St. Giles's Church, but it was hard to know which to reject. A similar question arose with regard to the various views of the town. They were chiefly

painted from the garden at Wentworth and in some the mist lay over it, while the hills beyond were in sunshine, in others the hills were in mist and the town in sunshine, but Mist on the Hills and Mist in the Valley would make pretty titles for the two main types. Then there was Healing Springs, which was a representation of the front of the bath establishment, and Bethesda would be a good title for the picture from the garden at the back. A quantity of country lanes and pools of water and harvest moons must be thinned out, and she weeded diligently among these and then found that those she had rejected had peculiar effects of beauty in them, and that some of those she had chosen were practically identical. It was a relief to come to Mrs. Oxney's cat, and the tree on the colonel's golf links (now prone, which gave a certain historical value to the picture) and a bed of geraniums, for these were wholly unlike each other and nobody could say that a cat was another aspect of geranium. . . . Then there came the question of framing: Miss Howard saw at once that she could not have forty or fifty pictures framed in the style of Evening Bells at five shillings and sixpence, for no bonuses of textile shares would run to that. She must consult the Town Councillor on the subject and obtain definite figures. Something neat, something glazed, was all that was required without a personal touching up of the gilding by his hands. If the public appreciated her pictures they would buy them without that.

Then there came the question of the price she was to put on the exhibits and instantly Miss Howard felt as

if she was dealing with problems quite unknown, for she had not the smallest idea what to ask for them. Evening Bells was undoubtedly the gem of the collection, but when she looked at Mrs. Oxney's cat (which her mistress had often declared she could hear purring) she wondered if she was not positively giving it away, if she charged any smaller sum for it. But what was that sum to be? She knew that pictures had no absolute value, like the price of gold and silver (and even that varied): they were worth neither more nor less than what anybody chose to pay for them. But she had to start the bidding, though she also concluded it, and since Evening Bells was clearly not worth a hundred pounds, and just as clearly worth more than one pound, she decided to put it in a class by itself at three guineas. The Puss-cat and Tree on Golf Links and perhaps Healing Springs should by this standard be two guineas, and everything else one guinea.... Or should she price everything at one guinea and hope to dispose of a fair number of them or should she price them all at half a guinea and hope to dispose of most? So perplexing was the whole question that if, at this moment, anybody had offered her five shillings apiece for the whole contents of the portfolio, she would have ecstatically accepted this meagre proposal and have foregone the Green Salon altogether. Yet the notion of an exhibition was dear to her: it was not everybody who came before the world like that; and besides, nobody had as yet offered her five shillings for the most accomplished of her efforts. In any case such a sum was a ludicrous price to ask for the

fruit of so much trouble, for each sketch had taken her at least two mornings' work, and many much more, and there was such a thing as a living wage even if you had a little place in Kent.

The immediate urgency was to find out from the Town Councillor at what figure he would frame forty or fifty sketches neatly but on an economical scale. She must also go into the price to be charged for admission. The idea of season tickets at a reduced cost was not practical, if the exhibition was to remain open for a fortnight at most, and the idea of having a private view first could not be entertained for a moment since Miss Howard would have to send complimentary tickets to everyone at Wentworth, who were precisely the people whom the decencies of friendship would compel to pay for admission. She put the selected masterpieces into one of the portfolios and with rather a haggard face went down to lunch.

The storm which had burst with such violence just as Mrs. Bliss caught the taxi had caught Colonel Chase a good three miles outside Bolton, on a peculiarly bleak piece of road, and he said "damn!" Luckily there was a barn standing in a field a few hundred yards away and, finding it locked, he took shelter under its eaves, lit a pipe, and with difficulty reminded himself that he was an old campaigner. Half an hour's wait in this exiguous protection made him feel very chilly, but the weather, no doubt accepting his challenge of being an old campaigner, showed what it was capable of and continued to pour forth windy sleet with incredible violence. The eaves

began to drip heavily upon him, the wind played about his skirts in a sportive and changeable manner, and after some more "damns" the old campaigner thought it was better to get wet quickly and thus be able to change his clothes and have a hot lunch, rather than to get wet slowly and be too late for it. He faced the sleet and with the pedometer ticking briskly in his pocket marched homeward. It should certainly register seven miles before he reached Wentworth, which would be a pretty sturdy performance on so vile a day, and the congratulations would be well earned.

Even as that vainglorious thought entered his mind, the hook of his pedometer slipped, and it slid unnoticed through a hole in his waistcoat pocket onto the muddy road. His mackintosh flapped, his knees became extremely wet, the rain ran off the back of his cap down his neck, and off its peak onto the end of his nose, and after an hour's odious pilgrimage he came dripping into the lounge where everyone, lunch being over, was sitting comfortably round the fire. Cries of admiration greeted him but he would sooner have felt less chilly and have foregone this enthusiastic reception.

Mrs. Oxney hurried off to the kitchen to see if there was still any Irish stew in existence which could be heated up and be ready for him when he had changed his clothes: the dish was snatched from the very jaws of the parlour maid, who was about to devour it and who had to be content with cold mutton instead. Already Colonel Chase had symptoms of a cold coming on: his throat was hot and dry and a series of prodigious sneezings

more than once interrupted his enjoyment of the Irish stew. What made the malignancy of the weather more marked was that he had no sooner got home than the rain stopped and there was promise of a bright afternoon, but he thought it would be wiser, with these ominous symptoms, not to go out again but sit warm in the smoking room and allow three guests to have a rubber of bridge with him. Of these Mrs. Holders should certainly not be one unless he found it absolutely impossible to get a fourth without her, for it was only right that she should be punished for her revolutionary behaviour last night: even if he was forced to ask her, he would be very cold and polite to her and not give her any advice at all nor explain how she might have won ever so many more tricks.

The cheerful group he had left in the lounge had broken up when he came back after his lunch: only Mrs. Bliss with Mr. Kemp and Florence were left. Mrs. Bliss had a book lying open on her lap and all three were seated bolt upright in a row and smiling. Their eyes were shut, which looked as if they might be enjoying a sociable nap, but their upright carriage was against this. A fresh explosion of sneezing seized him as he approached, at which they all opened their eyes but smiled as before. This was very strange and he could not understand what they were doing with themselves.

"I'm afraid I've caught a fearful cold," he said. "I got wet through on my walk and chilled to the bone."

Mrs. Bliss looked at Mr. Kemp, then at Florence, and finally at Colonel Chase.

"No, Colonel," she said with great sweetness of manner, "you haven't got a cold at all. Error."

"I wish it was," he said, "but there's no error about it. Shiverings, sneezings, sore throat. That spells 'cold.' "

"Error!" said Mrs. Bliss again tenderly.

This odd situation was broken in upon by warblings descending the stairs, and Miss Howard tripped lightly down, dressed for walking with a bulky portfolio under her arm, and quite unconscious of the presence of other people.

"La donn' e mobile," sang Miss Howard. "Oh, Colonel Chase, I never saw you! Not coming out again on this beautiful afternoon?"

"Not I. I've got a cold coming on and I shall stop in and nurse it. Are you going into the town?"

"Yes: I've got to see about my little pictures being framed. Just fancy! I'm going to hold a little teeny picture exhibition of some of my rubbishy sketches. So rash? But nobody would give me any peace until I promised to."

This was approximately though not precisely true: Miss Howard had told the group in the lounge that Mrs. Bowen had said that everyone was longing for her to do so, and the group in the lounge had all said, "Oh, you must!" again and again and again. She had to yield.

"So frightened about it," said Miss Howard. "I shall certainly leave Bolton the day before it opens so as not to hear all the unkind things you say about it."

"Dear girl," said Mrs. Bliss, "you know how we shall all enjoy it. Such a refreshment!"

Miss Howard kissed her fingers and dropped the portfolio of sketches. The colonel stooped to pick it up for her, but long before he got down the sharpest sort of pain shot through the small of his back and he recovered to erect position with difficulty.

"Attack of lumbago, too, I'm afraid," he said, and Florence, Mr. Kemp, and Mrs. Bliss all muttered "Error."

"Dear me, I hope not," said Miss Howard, for the social pleasures of Wentworth were sorely disquieted when the colonel had lumbago. "Can't I get you something for it in the town?"

"A bottle of quinine, if you'd be so good," he said, "and a packet of thermogene. Please tell the chemist to send them up at once."

Miss Howard went gaily off, breaking into song again just before she closed the front door. She had every graceful gift, thought Florence, whose eyes followed her as she tripped down the drive.

"And the rest of our party?" asked Colonel Chase.

"In the smoking room, I think," said Mr. Kemp, wishing the colonel would not stand so close to him with that bad cold coming on. Of course it was Error, but he did not like Error in such immediate proximity. "They talked of playing bridge."

The colonel took himself and his error off. Of course there was no reason why four people should not play

bridge if they felt inclined to, but if there was bridge in the air it was usually round him that it condensed. A sound of laughter came forth from the smoking room as he opened the door and he knew the sort of bridge which that meant: chatty, pleasant bridge unworthy of the name. There they were, Mrs. Oxney, Mrs. Bertram, and Mrs. Holders and Mr. Bullingdon all very gay, and unconscious for the moment of his entrance.

"Oh, pick it up, Mrs. Oxney," said Tim, "and put it back in your lily-white hand. We don't mind; but if you play any more cards out of turn I shall trump them as they lie on the table."

"Most kind, I'm sure," said Mrs. Oxney. "I will take it back if no one minds. Such a beautiful card too. Oh, there's Colonel Chase. We're just playing a rubber, Colonel, to pass the time till tea. We'll be finished presently, and then you must cut in and show us how."

Colonel Chase pulled up a chair between Tim Bullingdon and Mrs. Oxney: such a position at the utmost possible distance from Mrs. Holders compatible with seeing the game was most marked. But she, being a woman of no perception and blankly ignorant that she was in disgrace, greeted him cordially.

"Yes, do, Colonel," she said, "and win back a bit of the fortune you lost last night. Why go to Monte Carlo when we can play bridge at Wentworth?"

Colonel Chase, from being able to see two hands while the third was on the table, seemed to have an almost uncanny knowledge of where the other cards were and made useful comments to Mrs. Oxney when she

finessed or refused to finesse, or trumped or refrained.

"Yes, you should have taken the finesse there," he said. "Pretty certain that the king was on your right, from the way the cards fell. . . . Ah, you ought to have trumped that: the remaining club was sure to be on your left."

"You always seem to know just where every card is before anything is played at all," said Mrs. Oxney admiringly. "I call it magic."

The magician drew his chair closer to the fire. If only Mrs. Holders had joined Mrs. Oxney in agreeing that he was a magician he might have forgiven her, but she only looked very much surprised and dealt in silence. He felt chilly and cross and grumpy.

"I hear Miss Howard's intending to open a palace of art next week," he observed. "I call it real blackmail, as I suppose we shall all be expected to go and buy something. Blackmail. . . . Bless me, where is my pedometer?"

He felt in pocket after pocket without result.

"Dear me, whatever can have happened to it?" said Mrs. Oxney. "That would be your walking pedometer, would it?"

"Naturally, as I didn't bicycle this morning," said he. "And I know I took it out with me, for I remember hearing it ticking as I started to come home."

"I warrant it was ticking pretty briskly then," said Mrs. Oxney, pleasantly but absently for she was sorting her hand and trying to find something above an eight. "I've never seen anyone walk your pace, Colonel."

He got up without acknowledging this compliment.

"I must go and see if I've left it upstairs," he said. "Odd thing if I have, for I usually carry it about with me all day."

Mrs. Holders waited till the door was closed.

"And puts it in his pajama pocket when he goes to bed," she remarked, "in case he turns over in the night. I pass."

"Two hearts," said Tim Bullingdon, who had heard about the sensational affair yesterday, "and when I say two hearts I've got a reason for it, partner."

"Oh, for shame!" said Mrs. Oxney.

"Well, I have a reason for it: it means I've got a lot. I hope he's lost his pedometer: I'm sick and tired of hearing how far he's been. I shall get one, I think, and tell you all if I walk more than fifty yards."

"Gracious me, I hope he hasn't lost it," said Mrs. Oxney. "He'll turn the house upside down to find it."

"I stole it," said Mrs. Holders, "and ate it for lunch. I double your two hearts, Tim. Whenever I double two hearts I've got a good reason for it."

The reason must have been that she was tired of this particular rubber, for this ill-advised manœuvre finished it.

"Cut again, quick," she said, "and then we'll begin another before he gets back. It's perfect heaven playing without him."

"Oh, pray wait a minute," said Mrs. Oxney.

"Why? We'll pretend it's the same one. You and me, Tim. Do try to remember when the ace of trumps is played."

They had got well on in the next rubber before Colonel Chase came back with an agitated and anxious face.

"Not a sign of it in my bedroom," he said. "But I find there was a hole in the pocket where I carry it, and it may have fallen on the carpet somewhere. I trust everyone will be very careful how they walk about the house till it's found. Valuable instrument, well travelled, too, all over India. Do you think you can trust your servants, Mrs. Oxney, not to have—ah—misappropriated it?"

Now if there was one thing on which Mrs. Oxney prided herself even more than on her housekeeping it was the honesty of her staff, and she answered him with unusual sharpness:

"I'd trust them all with a bag of money and never think to count it before or after," she said. "You might as well suspect me or Mrs. Holders."

Colonel Chase could not understand why they all looked at each other and then bent their heads over their cards.

The terrible news went abroad at tea time that the valuable instrument was missing and everybody walked about with Agag delicacy, peering at the places where they proposed to set their feet for fear of trampling on this pearl. Once Tim Bullingdon's dastardly heart leaped for joy when he planted one of his sticks on a fragment of coal which cracked beneath it much as the valuable instrument might have done, but his pleasure was short-lived: it wasn't It.

Miss Howard had not seen it, she was sure, gleam-

ing on the road between Wentworth and the town, every spot over which Colonel Chase could have passed since he came in this morning had been systematically searched, and the dreadful surmise that he must have dropped it somewhere on the other side of Bolton was probably only too true.

And all the time (what anxiety would the knowledge of this have saved) it was safely reposing on the fender of Mr. Amble's shop, where Miss Howard had ordered quinine and thermogene. His honest lad, bicycling back from an errand along the road where the colonel had dropped it, saw it gleaming in the miry roadway and picked it up. A suspicious yellowness below the plating of the valuable instrument had convinced him that it was not silver, and having never seen a pedometer before it appeared to him to be an unusual type of watch which was no use for telling the time and might possibly be traced if he pawned it. So he gave it to Mr. Amble, who put it to dry on the parlour fender, and shortly after Miss Howard's departure displayed a notice in his shop window to say a pedometer had been found, apply within. The honest lad then discounted any merit he might have acquired by not retaining a suspicious and useless object by forgetting to take the quinine and thermogene to Wentworth. Instead he put up the shutters as dark was drawing on, spent the sixpence that Mr. Amble had given him on cigarettes, and Mr. Amble gave the pedometer a brush-up.

Tea was always served at Wentworth in the drawing room. A small dinner wagon with teapots of Indian and

China was wheeled in, solid refreshment was arranged on a convenient table, and usually this was a very pleasant and chatty meal, and one at which Colonel Chase made himself most entertaining. He had a fund of stories, which he lavishly recounted, and often he sat there for nearly an hour before he went upstairs to read, telling them about the curate's egg, and the little boy who took a sip of his father's whisky and soda, and not liking the taste, put it back in the glass. Then there was the thrilling tale of the man-eating tiger, which Mrs. Oxney said she could never hear without trembling, though she knew that it ended all right and the tiger did not eat this man, and the story about the ghost which the colonel had seen in the dak-bungalow somewhere near Agra, and which was far more terrifying than anything Mr. Kipling had written. Then when he had terrified them so much that Mrs. Oxney said that she, for one, wouldn't be able to sleep a wink that night, he restored confidence and gaiety by the tale of the dean who gargled with port wine by mistake and told his doctor he thought it would suit him very well taken internally in larger quantities. But to-night Colonel Chase had no such titbits for them: he sneezed and scowled and was silent, and made sudden excursions beneath the piano to see whether the pedometer had not secreted itself under the pedals. A great many heads were shaken over his chances of recovering it and Mrs. Bliss alone was optimistic. She, after hearing about it, just closed her eyes, and then said she was sure that everything would prove to be happy and harmonious. It was very pleasant to know that Mrs.

Bliss had no fear about the pedometer but it did not really help matters.

Colonel Chase roused himself from his melancholy, when the parlour maid came in to clear away tea, to question her sharply as to whether anything had been heard of It, and whether a parcel had arrived for him from the chemist's. The double negative of her answer seemed to intensify the prevailing gloom, and even the drawing of the curtains and the kindling of all the electric lights made but a hollow mockery of cheerful coziness. Miss Howard, also sharply questioned, was quite sure she had given the order that the packet was to be sent up at once.

"That was all you asked me to do, Colonel Chase," with some dignity, "and I did it."

That gave Mrs. Bliss a cue.

"Dear girl," she said, "I'm going to ask you to do something nice, and oh, please do it. Won't you run your hands over the piano? Just one of those sweet little fragments? How dear of you! How you spoil me!"

This was better than nothing; there was a reason for silence, if Miss Howard was playing, and she gave them several sweet little fragments, during one of which Colonel Chase left the room, and was heard bawling down the telephone in the lounge. Everybody of course had only half an ear for the sweet fragments while this was going on, and Miss Howard very considerately played with the soft pedal down, for she was as interested as anybody. He was heard to give a number to the exchange, which Mrs. Oxney whispered was Mr. Amble's,

and presently called out, "Perfectly disgraceful, and if your shop's shut up, and your boy's gone home, you ought to bring it up yourself now. Shameful!" Mr. Amble, thereupon, so it was easy to make out, must have got a little heated too, and have replaced the receiver at his end, for Colonel Chase, after saying "Hullo" eight or nine times in a crescendo of fury, put his receiver back (as anybody could hear) and went upstairs. He walked with a heavy thumping tread as if he had quite forgotten that everyone else was still enjoined to step carefully for fear of pulverizing the pedomoter.... It was all dramatic enough, but no one knew the full splendour of the situation for even as Colonel Chase went thumping upstairs Mr. Amble went back to his parlour and finished polishing up the colonel's pedometer.

Miss Howard released the soft pedal and trod on the other one: there was nothing now for which to listen elsewhere so they had all concentrated themselves on the long shake with the crossing arpeggios. Florence had stolen across to the chair which Colonel Chase had vacated close to the piano and rapturously followed Miss Howard's twinkling fingers. How nimble and slender they were, and those same fingers had been so still and steady when they held the brush which picked out the reflections in the river. Life was becoming exciting for Florence.

When the arpeggio passage came to an end as usual in three crashing chords, everyone felt much better, for Colonel Chase had gone up to his room and the eclipse for the present was over; and there was Miss Howard

at the piano. Mrs. Oxney heaved a sigh of relief and rapture.

"I wish the colonel had heard that," she said. "He is a little worried, isn't he, with his cold and no quinine or pedometer? Most aggravating for him, but please don't get up, Miss Howard. Mayn't we have 'O rest in the Lord,' though it isn't Sunday?"

Miss Howard let them have it, very slowly and with great feeling, accentuating the melody. She gazed thoughtfully at the ceiling, and all her audience gazed thoughtfully at other inappropriate spots, and Florence gazed at Miss Howard. Mrs. Oxney found herself thinking of the late Mr. Oxney, and Mrs. Bertram thought about coke, and Mrs. Holders thought about the inquiry she had sent to the Sunday *Gazette* about their bridge last night, and Mr. Kemp with closed eyes thought about his left hip, and Mrs. Bliss thought about Mind, and Miss Howard thought about the cost of the frames for her pictures, but all wore precisely the same dreamy and wistful expressions. A perfect gale of sighs succeeded the last note and a subdued chorus of "Thank you, Miss Howard." Mrs. Bertram had determined to get more coke in at any cost, Mrs. Holders had calculated that Slam would have plenty of time to answer her query in next Sunday's issue, Mrs. Oxney had regretted that her late husband had sold his share in the Bolton Electric Company, and Mr. Kemp had lifted his left leg quite high and found that it certainly moved more easily. . . . But something had to be done, for this pious hour could not go on until dinner time, and Mrs. Holders

mercifully put an end to it by staggering toward the door. Tim followed suit, and as the wet and cold of the day had dismally affected them both, she groped her way along the piano and Tim cakewalked more prancingly than ever along the opposite wall. They collided at the door, for each of them tried to open it for the other, and reviled each other's clumsiness. They groped their way across the lounge and established themselves in the smoking room.

"That's better," she said. "Now let's be real: don't let us rest in the Lord; let's—— Oh, Tim, let's contemplate Colonel Chase. I would sooner have twenty colds in the head, by the way, and lose a hundred pedometers than ache as I'm aching to-night. You're pretty bad, my dear, aren't you? Poke the fire."

Tim poked the fire with one of his sticks. It had an india-rubber ferrule, which when he withdrew it was fizzling and giving off a perfectly sickening smell.

"There!" he said triumphantly. "I made that smell and all because you told me to poke the fire. You made it, in fact. About aches: don't let us talk about such a boring subject. Nor about the colonel; what really interests me is Mrs. Bliss. She's holding a sort of healing class. They close their eyes and smile. Did you ever see Kemp smile before? I never did. They close their eyes and smile, I tell you, and assert that they are quite well. I wish his smile didn't make me feel so morose."

"Oh, Tim, how thrilling," she said. "I hadn't grasped what they were about: I only thought they looked boiled. I hope she'll leave me and my aches alone. I

should consider it great impertinence if she attempted to interfere with them."

This robust view made him laugh.

"I quite agree," he said. "I've got a strong sense of property, too. My aches are my own, and they're quite real, and I should resent it very much if anybody denied it. Lord, what bosh! And she has baths, too, just like the rest of us. But here we are on the boring topic again. Much better not to think about it and play piquet."

"Come on, then. How I hate my vile body to-day."

"Loathsome, isn't it? But you'll feel better if you rook me."

Mrs. Oxney and her sister meantime had gone back to their sitting room, Miss Howard (after playing "O rest in the Lord" again, which Mrs. Bliss sang *sotto voce* in a small buzzing voice like a bluebottle with a broad smile) went to get on with her catalogue, and the three students of Mental Science were left to their studies. Mr. Kemp refused to be interested in its larger aspects: it existed, as far as he was concerned, for the purpose of making him better. They all sat with eyes closed realizing Omnipotent Mind for a little, and then he stretched out his left leg, which was the worst. Encouraged by the absence of pain he got up, and with only one stick hobbled across the room and back again.

"I'm convinced that this joint is moving more freely," he said excitedly. "I don't believe I've walked so easily since that good week I had at Bath in the spring. At Buxton I never stirred a yard without two sticks, did I, Florence?"

"You're walking as well as anybody else can walk, dear Mr. Kemp," said Mrs. Bliss, to whom the most atrocious lies on this subject were beautiful truths. "If you only chose you could jump onto that chair like a bird hopping onto a branch."

He looked at this formidable altitude and even bent his knees as if about to spring.

"I almost believe I could," he said.

"Oh, don't, Papa," exclaimed Florence. "You know that Dr. Dobbs said that any improvement must come slowly. I mean——"

"Dear child!" said Mrs. Bliss, "naughty! That's the false idea we're working to destroy."

"I know: I forgot for a moment," said Florence. "But he'd much better not try to jump, had he?"

Mr. Kemp thought so himself but he was much encouraged by his long walk across the room.

"Really, I'm not sure that I shall have my reclining bath to-morrow," he said. "I shall only have my masseur. And yet I don't know. You mean to go on with your baths, don't you, Mrs. Bliss?"

"Yes, for the sake of my dear husband, as I told you," said she. "And there's no harm in doing it so long as you're perfectly certain it can't posibly do you any good. All the time I was in my bath this morning, so warm and restful, I fixed all my thoughts on Mind."

Mr. Kemp's walking tour had not ended quite as felicitously as it began, and a few sharp twinges made him glad to get back to his chair.

"And what shall I do next?" he asked. "I've had a

good twenty minutes self-treatment and you and Florence were treating me too."

Mrs. Bliss leaned forward and warmed her hands at the fire. They were not cold, of course.

"We should all spend most of our time in helping others," she said. "We get strength that way. Poor Colonel Chase now: my heart bleeds for him with all his false claims about losing his pedometer and having a bad cold and lumbago. Shall we help him?"

Mr. Kemp did not feel any real spiritual compulsion to help Colonel Chase, whose false claims were such petty little disturbances, but if he could get strength that way which would enable him to treat himself more powerfully, he was quite willing to help him. He would have to rest before dinner and glanced at the clock.

"Well, for ten minutes," he said.

"Dear of you!" said Mrs. Bliss. "The poor colonel is so full of illusions this afternoon, which makes him feel worried and ill and anxious. Let us all give him absent treatment."

"Mustn't we send up and tell him?" asked Florence. "I don't think I should like to do that."

"No, dear, it makes no difference whether he knows it or not. Let us deny his worries and chilly feelings. Let us see him healthy and happy and full of sunshine."

This required a good deal of imaginative effort on the part of those who knew Colonel Chase, for it was no use saying that sunshine was one of his characteristic attributes. Mr. Kemp and Florence had to close their eyes very tight on many past memories in their effort to real-

ize a sunny colonel. As for seeing him healthy and happy, one glance at him when he came down to dinner that evening was enough to make that internal conception of him very difficult to cling to, for he had a cold of the most violent kind, he incessantly coughed and sneezed, he had a poor appetite, he was bent and stiff with lumbago, and looked the picture of misery. Luckily he was extremely hoarse, being hardly able to speak above a whisper, and so the scarifying remarks he addressed to the parlour maid who served him, complaining of his food and his drink, and the draught and his napkin, and light and his knives and forks could not be made out with any clearness, but the growling noises which accompanied poor Mabel's visits to his table could not reasonably be interpreted as the utterances of a happy man. There was no news of the pedometer, the infamous Amble had not sent his quinine and thermogene, and when, after sitting almost on the hob of the smoking-room fire for half an hour, he went up to bed without even suggesting a game of bridge, it was felt by those who had tried to see him happy and full of sunshine that their visions were as yet unfulfilled. Further, Mr. Kemp's hip had suffered a bad relapse, and there was no longer any doubt in his mind that he would have his bath as usual next day. He was much disappointed at the general result of the evening's séance, and wondered if his hip had ever been so bad before. Mind, in his view, was of very doubtful value.

But none of these mutinous ideas had the smallest

effect on Mrs. Bliss's complete confidence, nor diminished the splendour of her smile. She knew, and soon everybody else would know, that all was well with Mr. Kemp's hip and the colonel's cold and her own arthritis and the missing pedometer.

CHAPTER IV

It has been said that miracles don't happen. This one did. The morning broke warm and sunny again and Miss Howard, who came downstairs, warbling the chorale of her improvisation, a few minutes before the breakfast gong sounded, observed that there was a nice parcel for Colonel Chase on the table of the lounge with perfidious Amble's label. It needed no ingenuity to surmise that this contained quinine and thermogene, and Mrs. Oxney, who had been looking at the proofs of her Wentworth advertisement, thought she had better send it up to his room.

"He's sure to stop in bed all morning," she said, "and the best plan too for such a nasty cold as he's got, and he can wrap himself up in that wool and dose himself at once. I'll send one of the maids up with it to make sure he'll have his breakfast in bed, and light his fire for him."

At that moment the miracle manifested itself. The words were hardly out of Mrs. Oxney's mouth when a loud, cheerful whistle sounded from above and Colonel Chase came tramping downstairs. His face was rosy from the cold bath which was one of the reasons why Englishmen were stronger than anybody else, and he stronger than any other Englishman, and his whistle

betokened his distinguished approval of the dealings of Providence.

"Good-morning, ladies," he said, standing at the salute. "You observe that Richard is himself again. Most extraordinary thing! When I have a cold like that I had yesterday I know I shall have two days in hell, if you'll pardon the expression, and three in purgatory. Now I was never worse in my life than I was when I went up to bed last night. Very unwell indeed. I went asleep at once and I awoke this morning as chirpy as a cricket and not a trace of my cold left."

"Well, isn't that wonderful!" said Mrs. Oxney. "I know your colds, Colonel, and I always say that nobody I ever saw has such colds as you. Terrific!"

"And I took no remedies at all," said he. "That monstrous chemist—ah, there's the parcel. I shall send it back, for I'm no more in need of his muck than I am of prussic acid. It's a miracle, I tell you, a sheer miracle. Such a recovery was never known before. My colds were famous in India. 'Look out for squalls when Colonel Chase has a cold,' was what my officers used to say to the subs when they joined the regiment. Lumbago gone, too: I did my dumb-bell exercises this morning with a boy's suppleness. I declare, if it wasn't for the loss of my pedometer, that I never felt happier in my life."

During the recital of this adorable news, Mr. Kemp had negotiated the descent of the stairs and now stood staring at Colonel Chase as if he had risen from the dead.

"You, Colonel?" he said. "And your cold quite gone?

Vanished in the night with no medicines? Miraculous."

"You may well say miraculous, sir," said the colonel. "Not a spoonful of Amble's rubbish and here I am, jolly as a sandboy and hungry as a hunter. Ah, here's Mrs. Bliss. Good-morning, Mrs. Bliss. Delightful morning, and me quite well again. Most remarkable thing."

Mrs. Bliss couldn't smile any more, for she always smiled to her full capacity.

"So glad, Colonel," she said. "But I'm not the least surprised. I knew for certain that you would be quite well this morning. Didn't I tell you so, Mr. Kemp?"

"I wish you'd told me too," said Colonel Chase, "and I shouldn't have felt so down and out as I did last night. Ha! Breakfast gong. There's music for a hungry man."

He headed the procession to the dining room, leaving Mrs. Bliss and Mr. Kemp to limp after him.

"But amazing," said Mr. Kemp. "To think that we did that! There must be something in it."

"Something in it?" said Mrs. Bliss. "There's everything in it, dear Mr. Kemp. And not amazing at all. Omnipotent Mind. It couldn't be otherwise. Error gone."

"But you treated me," said he, "and I'm sure I treated myself half the night for I slept very poorly. Why am I as bad as ever this morning? Not a sign of improvement."

This was quite easy to explain. Mr. Kemp's erroneous rheumatism was of long standing: Error was deep-rooted in him. But Colonel Chase had only been in Error for a few hours, and that foolish mistake of his could be

annihilated at once. The explanation did not, however, fully satisfy Mr. Kemp, for he argued that since rheumatism was (*ex hypothesi*) absolutely nonexistent, the painful illusion ought to vanish as easily as a cold when once you turned Mind onto it. But the manifest healing of Colonel Chase had made a great impression on him and he was fully determined to persevere till his rheumatic error followed Colonel Chase's error of catarrh into its native nothingness.

Before the ambulance wagon for the baths came round, Wentworth was buzzing with excitement, and the only person who had not been told that Colonel Chase had been cured by Mind and Mrs. Bliss (and possibly Mr. Kemp and Florence) was Colonel Chase himself, for Mrs. Oxney and Mrs. Bertram were sadly afraid that if he was informed that his healing was spiritual he might fly into so savage a tantrum at such an idea that rage would entirely cancel the spiritual benefit and perhaps his cold might return again worse than ever. It was indeed a great relief when, soon after breakfast, he set off on his bicycle to see what could be done in the way of setting up a new record, and so everybody could have a nice gossip about it all before going down to the baths. Mrs. Bliss assured them that the cause was entirely the effect of Mind and had really nothing to do with her, but naturally nobody believed that.

"To be sure it's most remarkable," said Mrs. Oxney, "and if you can drive a cold away like that I don't see what you can't do. But I shouldn't like to tell the colonel how it happened, for you can't be certain how he'll take a

bit of news like that. At the same time I feel you ought to have the credit of it, for nothing will make me believe his cold went away of its own accord. And neither quinine nor thermogene did he use—lumbago too—for when he came down this morning with his cold quite gone there was the parcel on the table."

Mrs. Bliss gave a happy little sigh.

"Yes, I'm glad his materia medica didn't arrive last night," she said, "or all you dear faithless people would have thought that material remedies had cured him, whereas there is no power in material at all. Indeed, I have no doubt that if he had taken his quinine, relying on it, he would have been worse than ever."

"We have had an escape then," said Mrs. Bertram. "But can't medicines help at all? I should have thought a little medicine and some Mind with it might do wonders. After all, you're taking the baths yourself, and massage as well."

The idea that Mrs. Bliss was taking the baths entirely for her husband's sake, and not for their remedial qualities, somehow seemed difficult for her audience to comprehend, though it was so patently clear and logical to herself. As for massage, that was officially called "mere manipulation," and even the faithful allowed broken legs to be set and put in splints, for that was mere manipulation too. The power of Mind, she explained, would undoubtedly set a broken leg, but a surgeon saved time and trouble. Mind by itself restored everyone to perfect harmony, health, and prosperity. All went well in every way with those who relied on Mind.

Miss Howard had been running through her improvisation before this illuminating discussion began. It was most annoying to have again forgotten the passage of octaves which led back into the few bars of Chopin's waltz, and she shuddered to think what would happen if a similar lapse of memory occurred when she was on the platform. Would everyone sit there forever, waiting, eternally waiting for what never came? . . .

"But does that apply to everything?" she asked. "If you rely on Mind, does everything go right?"

Mrs. Bliss was getting worked up now.

"Yes, everything," she said, "for Mind is universal and omnipotent. All is Mind and Mind is all. The proposition is proved by the rule of inversion. Invert it, and it remains equally true. Hence Evil is nothing and nothing is evil."

"Cats eat mice, therefore mice——" began Mrs. Holders. But this flippancy was cut short by Miss Howard, who though a little dazed stuck to her point.

"Quite so, I see," she said. "But what I want to ask is that if there was something one had undertaken to do, not for oneself but for others, would reliance on Mind make you do it beautifully?"

"Yes, dear girl, of course," said Mrs. Bliss. "Mind denies evil, illness, failure. Whatever you want must come to you, if only you rely on Mind."

"Dear me, how comfortable it sounds," said Mrs. Oxney. "If only Colonel Chase relied on Mind, perhaps he would find his pedometer. He's gone along the road where he must have lost it, to look for it as he makes his

record. Couldn't you rely on Mind, Mrs. Bliss, and discover it for him?"

Mrs. Bliss was observed to close her eyes for a few seconds. That was remarked afterward. Simultaneously a series of hoots from the bus indicated that it had been waiting a long time already, and they all hurried away at their various paces.

Colonel Chase had left the unopened packet for the perfidious Amble to be returned with the withering message that it had arrived too late, and Mrs. Bliss, delighted to purge Wentworth of any fragment of materia medica, took charge of it. She found that she had a few minutes to spare before her bath, and since, on the one hand, Mind assured her that she was quite well and not at all lame, and her doctor that gentle walking was good for the supposedly affected joint, she limped away to Mr. Amble's shop to leave the packet there. She was looking, not in scorn but with indulgent pity, at the army of futile bottles and inefficacious drugs that were deployed in his window when her attention was attracted to a notice that was affixed there. What met her eye was this:

Found
A plated pedometer
Apply Within.

She opened the door and a tingling alarm bell continuously rang in the parlour behind the shop, as if she were a thief intent on pilfering materia medica. It ceased as Mr. Amble emerged.

"I have brought back a packet you sent up to Colonel Chase at Wentworth," she said. "It only arrived this morning, and as he is now quite well, he would be greatly obliged if you would take your goods back."

Now though Mr. Amble had felt justly incensed the night before at Colonel Chase's very intemperate remarks through the telephone, he had been rather sorry that he had rivalled him with tart replies and so sudden a cutting off of his communications, for the colonel was constantly getting sticking plaster and soap and bicycle oil and lozenges at his shop, and Mr. Amble would regret losing his valuable patronage. Also the petitioner was a lady of smiling and benevolent address and she limped heavily, and so was another likely customer.

"Certainly, madam," said he with great suavity. "Anything to oblige Colonel Chase and yourself."

"So good of you," said Mrs. Bliss. "And I saw something about a pedometer in your window. Colonel Chase lost his pedometer yesterday on the road. I wonder if I might take it up to Wentworth, where I am staying, and see if it is his?"

Mr. Amble hastened to produce it.

"I'll wager it is the colonel's," he said, "for if Colonel Chase lost a pedometer on the road yesterday and my lad found one in the road yesterday, no doubt they, so to speak, are the ones. Often have I heard it ticking as he's walked about my shop. An old instrument but I dare say useful still. And is there anything more I can supply you with, madam?"

"Nothing, thank you. So much obliged—Mr. Amble, isn't it?—and how pleased Colonel Chase will be."

She paused, and a playful, innocent idea gleamed in her brain. She made the sweetest face at Mr. Amble, coaxing and childlike, with her head a little on one side, and her chin a little raised, and a really wonderful smile.

"And may the pedometer be a secret between you and me, Mr. Amble?" she said. "I want to make a mysterious surprise about it. Oh, such fun, but nobody else must know."

Mr. Amble thought this was a very pleasant though an unusual sort of lady, and, completely mystified, agreed. The prospect of regaining the colonel's custom by taking back the goods was reward enough for him, and he did not even dream of suggesting the repayment of his disbursement of sixpence on the honest lad. So Mrs. Bliss went back to the baths with the pedometer ticking jerkily in her bag as she hobbled along.

Miss Howard had not come down by the bus but had waited up at Wentworth to have a turn at the elusive passage of octaves which had bothered her earlier. While there were in the lounge so many of those who would listen in a few days to her improvisation she had been playing very gently with the soft pedal down, for she did not want the extempore to become too familiar before its birth. But now the patients had gone brinewards and Mrs. Oxney had gone to the chicken run and Mrs. Bertram to the linen closet and there was no reason any more for these surreptitious tinklings. She re-

membered that Mrs. Bliss had said that any kind deed undertaken for the sake of others would be prosperously performed if reliance was placed on Mind, and so now before she began she told Mind that she was playing in aid of the Children's Hospital and had complete confidence in its Omnipotence. Then with the freedom of the loud pedal she concentrated on her work, and lo, the stream of octaves flowed along like torrents in spring. Of course it was easier to play when unshackled by the fear of being overheard, but never had she known so flashing an ease of execution, or so perfect a transition into the Chopin waltz. Then she tried the chorale, the last line of which had escaped her at her last attempt, and now without the slightest conscious effort on her part it streamed solemnly from her finger tips. "Most wonderful," thought Miss Howard as, rather awestruck at her own brilliance, she closed the lid of the piano. "I couldn't remember either of those bits just before, and now, relying on Mind, I feel I can never forget them. There must be something in it."

She had to go down to the baths to measure up the Green Salon and see how many pictures would be needed, to try genteelly to beat Mr. Bowen down over the price of framing them, and to arrange for the typewriting of the catalogue. She would much have preferred printing, but the cost of printing was frankly prohibitive; this seemed to have something to do with the coal strike but the connection was difficult to understand. She tripped lightly down the hill to the imagined accompaniment of those agile octaves and arrived at the door of the Estab-

lishment at the very moment when Mrs. Bliss was entering on her return from Mr. Amble's. She came up behind her without being seen, and noticing that Mrs. Bliss ticked as she moved, wondered if this was a symptom of arthritis. Colonel Chase ticked too, but that was his pedometer, and, alas, it was sadly to be feared that his ticking days were over. Then she said "Bo!" playfully, and Mrs. Bliss turning briskly round emitted a perfect tattoo of ticks. They seemed to come from her bag or thereabouts rather than her hip, but noises were always hard to localize.

"Sweet girl!" said Mrs. Bliss. "What a mischievous child you are to try to startle me like that. Have you come to see about your dear exhibition?"

"Yes," said Miss Howard. "And, oh, I must tell you I could not recollect two passages of my improvisation for next week—I mean I could not remember something I wanted to recollect, when I was practising earlier in the morning, and I just closed my eyes and relied on Mind, because I was going to play in aid of the Children's Hospital next week, and everything I had forgotten came back to me at once. Wasn't that extraordinary?"

Mrs. Bliss laughed her happy laugh, but kept her bag still.

"Not in the least extraordinary," she said. "It would have been extraordinary, impossible in fact, if you hadn't recollected every note of your delicious tunes."

"But it was wonderful, wasn't it?" asked Miss Howard.

"Yes, indeed, little one," said Mrs. Bliss tenderly.

"All is wonderful in Mind: wonderful and loving and perfect. Dear me; it is after eleven, I see, and I must hurry for my dear husband's sake, or I shall have to shorten my bath. Au revoir, dear! In a day or two I shall be climbing stepladders and helping you arrange your sweet pictures."

The Green Salon looked quite cheerful on this sunny morning, in spite of the uncleaned skylight, the slight odour of rotten eggs which hung about the bath establishment, and the bare deal floor, and these slight drawbacks would presently be remedied, for Mrs. Bowen had promised that the skylight should be resplendent before the day of the opening, Mrs. Oxney had promised a nice piece of carpet for the floor, and Mr. Amble could be trusted to have some sort of aromatic riband in stock which smouldered persistently and would soon overcome the less agreeable aroma.

Miss Howard measured up the walls and decided that forty-five sketches properly spaced would be as many as the Green Salon would hold without skying or earthing any of them, and having successfully reduced Mr. Bowen's estimate for framing, tripped into Mr. Amble's to consult him about the fumigatory. It was always pleasant to exchange a few words with that noted conversationalist, and Miss Howard told him that Colonel Chase's cold for which she had ordered remedies yesterday had happily disappeared.

"Yes, I was sorry to have vexed the colonel last night about the delivery of his order," said Mr. Amble, "but I trust that's put right, miss, for I've taken the goods

back and very glad to do so. A most agreeable and affable lady called here this morning about it, and we soon settled that. Not a lady that I've seen here before, but from Wentworth, as she told me, and walking, you may say, dot and go one, as I could see."

"Yes, that must have been Mrs. Bliss," said Miss Howard. "Such a favourite already with us all."

She considered whether she should tell Mr. Amble about the affable lady's treatment of Colonel Chase's cold, but decided that it would be a want of tact to do so. Mental healing was certainly a competition with Mr. Amble's business. Wiser not.

"We were all so glad that the colonel's cold got better," she said, "for he lost his pedometer yesterday, and between the two was a good deal worried."

Mr. Amble remembered that the affair of the pedometer was a secret between him and the smiling lady, and behaved like a man of honour. He had already removed the notice about it in his window.

"Dear me, he wouldn't like that," he said. "But who knows, miss, that it mayn't be found one of these days, and that we shall hear it ticking away again?"

There was something reserved and oracular about this sentiment and Miss Howard received the distinct impression that Mr. Amble knew something about the pedometer. Yet, what could he have known, for surely he would have thrown any light that he possessed, however small and glimmering, upon the loss, now that he had been told of it.

Miss Howard often had these strange sudden impres-

sions, for she was what is called "very intuitive." Usually they came to nothing and she forgot them; occasionally they came to something and then she remembered them. Descending to business she told Mr. Amble her errand and he strongly recommended a fragrant riband called "Souvenir d'Orient," which he lit and which immediately filled the shop with a swoony Arabian odour of musk, apoponax, and incense, against which the rotten eggs would have no chance at all.

The bus had got back to Wentworth and the patients dispersed to their rooms to rest before Miss Howard had finished her jobs. She went out into the garden with her painting apparatus to touch up one of the sketches she had chosen for exhibition called Splendid Noon, which seemed to stand in need of a little more splendour, and worked away at the sharpening of the shadows till the first gong told her that lunch was imminent. Colonel Chase had come in from his bicycling in the highest spirits, and she had to guess how many miles he had been since breakfast. Remembering that his runs for a morning's ride (basing the conjectural record when *that* pedometer got out of order) was thirty-five miles, and seeing his elation, she guessed thirty-six, and clapped her hands with admiration when she heard he had been thirty-seven.

"Not so bad for a man who thought he would be spending the day in bed," he said, "and I dare say I shall go out again for a short spin this afternoon."

"Oh, you mustn't overdo it," said she. "I think I

should be content if I were you. But you haven't found your pedometer?"

His face hardly fell at all, so gratifying to himself and others was the new record.

"No, to break my record and find my pedometer would be too much of a red-letter day," he said. "I'm afraid I shall have to order another."

Mrs. Bliss had joined them in the lounge just as he said this. Mr. Kemp was there, too, and Florence, and Mrs. Oxney and Mrs. Holders, and all were witnesses of what occurred.

Mrs. Bliss, leaning on her stick, was standing close to the colonel with her left hand behind her back.

"No, Colonel Chase," she said, "you needn't order another. Guess what I've got in my hand: no peeping!"

"Not my——" began the colonel. Emotion choked his utterance, and Mrs. Bliss held out her left hand to him and said "Peep-o!"

There it lay, bright and clean, for Mr. Amble had polished it up beautifully.

"So glad: such a privilege," she said charmingly.

He grasped the beloved object and shook it. It ticked as brightly as ever.

"My dear lady, I can't thank you enough," he said. "I shall certainly go for a walk this afternoon for the pleasure of using it again. The Bliss-pedometer: may I christen it the Bliss-pedometer? Where did you find it?"

A dreamy, absent sort of look came into Mrs. Bliss's eyes.

"Down in the town, I think," she said. "Sometimes I

lose myself in thought, and this morning, just before my bath, I was meditating deeply and joyfully as I strolled about in the sweet sunshine. And then there it was in my hand! Did I pick it up? Perhaps that was it. Or did someone give it me? Who knows? But somehow I felt sure that I should find it for you. So pleased!"

The effect of this was immense: a sort of awe fell on Wentworth generally, with the exception of Tim Bullingdon, who, when Mrs. Holders told him of the marvellous recovery of the valuable instrument, merely said, "Oh, that blasted thing has been found, has it? More pedometer chat." But apart from him a very profound impression was made and the reappearance of the pedometer was generally considered to belong to the same class of manifestation as the disappearance of the colonel's cold: a notion which Mrs. Bliss certainly did not discourage. A small committee held in Mrs. Oxney's room after lunch inclined to the opinion that Colonel Chase should now be told to whom he owed (in some mysterious manner) both these benefits. The reappearance of his pedometer taken alone might be held to be just a lucky chance, so, too, possibly, might the miraculous disappearance of his cold, but taken together, with Mrs. Bliss as direct agent (under Mind) in both, they clearly outran any reasonable theory of coincidence. He might have got in one tantrum if a spiritual cause had been suggested for his convalescence only, and in another if the same had been assigned to the recovery of his pedometer, but when the two were presented together, it was felt there need be no apprehension about tantrums.

Mrs. Bliss took no part in this conference, for they all knew from what source she derived these manifestations of health and harmony, but she went out and sat under the cedar, where she pursued her mental work.

Colonel Chase had gone off for a walk in spite of the morning's record on the wheel, in order to feel the pulse of his pedometer beating again in the region of his liver, and had given some thought to the happy reappearance of the instrument. It was wrapped in mystery: Mrs. Bliss apparently had found it while in a species of trance, and though he would have been naturally inclined to scoff at trances, there seemed to be something to be said for them. He already knew that she was a believer in the power of Mind and such hocus-pocus, but if hocus-pocus could find pedometers he had no quarrel with it. In consequence, when on his vigorous return from his walk Mrs. Oxney told him that the lame lady had given him mental treatment for that tornado of a cold which had fallen on him yesterday, he listened without any symptom of tantrums.

"And you know as well as I do, Colonel, if not better," said Mrs. Oxney in conclusion, "that when you have a cold it is a cold, not a matter of two sneezes and a drop of eucalyptus on your handkerchief. Your cold always means a day in bed, and pulls you down dreadfully, and if ever you had a cold in your life yesterday was the day. But here you are now making records in the morning and your pedometer in your pocket in the afternoon, and never looking better, though last night you were in for one of your worst."

Colonel Chase was proud of his fair-mindedness.

"Upon my soul, that's all quite true," he said. "I don't wish to deny it. And then, as you say, the whole trouble vanished. Yet it must be stuff and nonsense. The woman's a crank if she thinks she cured me."

"Well, if she's a crank, I'm a crank too," said Mrs. Oxney, "and that's a thing I've never been called before. It's not your cold only, there's that pedometer. I said to her: 'Couldn't you rely on Mind, Mrs. Bliss, and discover it for him?' Those were my very words and no sooner had I said this than she closed her eyes and sat silent. We all noticed it. And then what does she do but find it in her hand?"

This powerful presentment of the case impressed him.

"Yes, I'm bound to say it's most remarkable," said he. "I'm no bigot, I hope. I've got an open mind on every question, and I know there are some things I can't account for. I've seen the mango trick in India, but really—— And yet one can hardly believe it. I must look into it. How does Mrs. Bliss explain it?"

"She just says with that sweet smile of hers that all is harmony and health and what she did was to realize it for you."

The colonel's robust intellect made a final effort to reject all it could not understand, and called his sense of humour to its aid.

"I'm sure it's not all harmony when Miss Howard gets to the piano," he said. "But that's flippant of me. I'm bound to say I can't understand it at all. Amazing! According to all my experience I should have been in bed

all day instead of bicycling thirty-seven miles this morning without fatigue and going for a walk with my pedometer this afternoon. By all chances it should have been crushed to bits under some lout's foot."

Colonel Chase, it need hardly be said, would have pooh-poohed the whole affair if it had happened to anybody else, calling it bunkum and piffle and gammon and spinach, just as he pooh-poohed every ghost story in the world except his own psychical experience in the dak-bungalow, calling them liver and indigestion and imagination and nerves. But anything that happened to himself was of another order of phenomena, and that evening he entered into somewhat condescending intercourse with Mrs. Bliss. He shrewdly catechized her about the action of Mind, just as he might have catechized a doctor about the action of quinine, and said: "Ah: so that's your theory, is it?" to her explanations. But the leaven had begun to work, and more than once over bridge that evening Mrs. Oxney thought she saw him close his eyes and smile like Mr. Kemp and Florence and Mrs. Bliss. And beyond doubt his manner to his partner was far less hectoring. He even allowed that on one occasion he might have played a hand better.

The rest of the week passed busily but uneventfully away, bringing Wentworth nearer to the momentous days which were coming. The first of the fateful series was Sunday, when there might be expected a reply from Slam to Mrs. Holders's inquiry. Most of the guests at Wentworth took in the *Sunday Telegraph* as a rule, but all those who were interested in bridge had, on this occa-

sion, ordered the *Sunday Gazette* instead. Usually it arrived during breakfast time, but to-day it was annoyingly late and most of them were in the lounge, starving for Slam, when it arrived.

Everyone snatched his copy and there was a loud rustle of paper as they all simultaneously turned to the page where Slam discussed bridge and White Knight chess, instead of to the leaf on which the cross-word puzzle for the week was set forth. It was considered certain that Mrs. Holders and Colonel Chase ran a dead heat in the perusal of the judicial paragraph, for just as she gave a little squeal of laughter, Colonel Chase said "Pshaw" or "Tush," and turned with a very red face to less important items. Then a dead hush followed and everyone but he read the long paragraph through twice. It ran thus, among the Answers to Correspondents:

WENTWORTH [Mrs. Holders's pseudonym]: The case you submit is well worth attention, because it is an admirable example of the fatal declaration too often made by ignorant dealers. There was no possible excuse for Z declaring two hearts unless he was burdened with superfluous cash. In so doing he completely ruined his partner's fine hand of diamonds, which would easily have taken Z and Y out and given them the rubber. But this ludicrous declaration once made, Y was perfectly right to say "no bid," for he naturally expected an overwhelming strength in hearts from Z, which when once cleared gave him six tricks in diamonds. Z's proper call of course was one heart (doubtful) or no bid, in which case Y would have declared two diamonds. B's double was perfectly sound. In fact we can only recommend A, B, and Y to disregard any declaration of Z's, if they ever have the misfortune to play with him again, until he has learned the elements of the game. We append the hands with a diagram as a warning to those who make these imbecile declarations.

Among the students of the *Sunday Gazette* was Florence, and she was thrilled to see her hand (Y) just as it had been dealt her with all those beautiful diamonds put in the paper with a diagram and to be told by the oracle that she was quite right to have said "no bid." Altogether forgetting Colonel Chase in the irrepressible joy of this publicity she cried out:

"Oh, look, Papa! Here's the game we had the other night, and I'm Y. That night I was so late, do you remember? Slam says I was quite right to say 'no bid.' Isn't that sweet of him, and aren't my diamonds lovely? And that's where Mrs. Oxney sat, for she's A, and Mrs. Holders is B, who doubled. How it all comes back! And Z, why——"

During the painful silence which followed these unfortunate remarks Colonel Chase was seen to close his eyes for a moment and smile, but when he opened them again he did not seem much better. His hand which held the wretched sheet trembled with fury, and so did his voice, which gradually rose to a roar.

"I see Slam comments on the hand you sent up for his decision, Mrs. Holders," he said. "I can only say that I totally disagree with him. Probably he's just a little cock of the walk at Tooting junior bridge club, if all was known. I suppose he likes to play the little tin god. I shall certainly write and put my view of the case, though I expect he's too dense to understand it. I shall sign it, too, instead of cowering under a nickname. 'Slam' indeed. 'Revoke' would be a more suitable name for him, I

shouldn't wonder. Impertinent little anonymous jackanapes——"

What further ebullitions would have followed is unknown, for even as he said "jackanapes" Colonel Chase, to the awe of the whole assembly, was suddenly stopped by an appalling fit of sneezing. Again and again he sneezed: the convulsions seemed interminable.

"God bless me [crash]" he said, "I believe I've caught another [crash] cold. Abominable nonsense: enough to make a man——"

He stopped, seeing Mrs. Bliss's serene and limpid gaze smilingly fixed on him. She held up her finger, as if in tender rebuke of a naughty child.

"Harmony, peace, health, deny inharmony, worry, sickness," she said. "All is Mind: Mind is all. Oh, Colonel Chase!"

If catalepsy or sudden death had fallen on every human being in the lounge, Wentworth could not have been stricken with more rigid immobility. Openly to rebuke Colonel Chase, who in a tantrum was not only impossible in fact but incredible in theory! And yet having done it, Mrs. Bliss smilingly closed her eyes, as if she had done nothing at all, and Mr. Kemp and Florence followed her example, calmly demonstrating. Mrs. Oxney tried to do the same, but curiosity as to how the colonel would take this was too strong, and she had to keep a flickering eyelid open.

Colonel Chase cleared his throat, he sniffed, he sneezed once more and once only, and his catarrh and his fury seemed to vanish like morning mists.

"Dear me, I thought I'd caught cold again," he said, "but it's a false alarm. And . . . I suppose we mustn't harbour unkind thoughts about anyone. Our bridge, too, only a game. Ha! Quite so! Nearly church time, isn't it? I shall walk there on this beautiful morning."

The omnibus which took Wentworth to church on Sunday free of charge was unusually full after this spiritual manifestation, which brought harmony out of tantrums, and Mrs. Oxney was unable to consider it a coincidence that the first hymn was "O Happy Band of Pilgrims." All day harmony, so miraculously restored after that wild outburst, shone on Colonel Chase: he and his pedometer had a wonderful walk that afternoon and throughout the peaceful rubber of bridge, in which the criminal Mrs. Holders took part, his hands dripped with trumps and kings and aces and convenient singletons. He adopted an almost reverential attitude toward Mrs. Bliss, and as he performed his dumb-bell exercises that night he beat time to his vigorous movements with denials of anger, malice, and colds in the head. He was aware how rightly he had been known in India as a hard-headed fellow, but such a marvellous series of things that had happened to him personally (and therefore could not be bosh and gammon and piffle and spinach), could not be overlooked by a fair-minded man. Their attribution to coincidence must be definitely abandoned: it would not meet the case. Getting into bed he closed his eyes and battened on the conception of himself as completely happy and healthy and prosperous. . . Under this pleasant treatment he instantly fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER V

INDEED there seemed on the ensuing Monday morning no conquests which were not within the victorious powers of Mental Science: Wentworth might almost become an establishment in direct competition with the baths and nauseating drinkings and general materia medica of Bolton Spa. Mr. Kemp actually refrained from brine that morning and sat in the lounge reading the Manual, demonstrating over his hip and putting principles to the test by making short walks between window and fireplace. Mrs. Bliss went down to the baths as usual but Wentworth was now beginning to grasp that this violation of right thinking must really be for the sake of her husband, since a woman who could cure colds and tantrums and recover pedometers like that could not be in any need of saline immersions. Before she left she spoke a few words to a gathering of students in Mrs. Oxney's room, which was really like a regular class of instructions and was attended by all the guests (except Mrs. Holders and Tim Bullingdon), as well as a couple of parlour maids with coughs. She told them that Mental Science filled you with health and energy for the harmonious accomplishment of the duties of life which must by no means be neglected, after which Colonel Chase started blithely off on the chief duty of his life, which

was riding a bicycle, and Miss Howard, wreathed in smiles, tripped down to the Green Salon to drive into its faded walls the nails on which to hang the pictures which were to bring joy and refreshment to so many, and, it was hoped, profit to herself, for the labourer, said Mrs. Bliss, was worthy, sweet girl, of her hire. As for the improvisation which was to take place at the entertainment next day, and not only delight others but bring in funds for the Children's Hospital, Miss Howard scarcely gave another thought to it for she found that a mere closing of her eyes, a smile, and a silent lifting of the spirit to Mind was sufficient to make her fingers reel out the most elusive passages, and she now felt she really had them by heart. Mrs. Bliss recommended her to give no further thought at all to the improvisation.

The guests were enjoying a few moments' quiet in the lounge after lunch before getting to their jobs again when the Reverend H. Banks, who was responsible for the entertainment to-morrow, and was also himself to sing twice and recite once, came in with a unique appeal. He was known to most of the company and was highly popular, for his ecclesiastical duties, strikingly performed at St. Giles's amid cottas and banners and maniples and incense and genuflections, were quite a feature at Bolton among visitors and made you feel, as Miss Howard said, that the Church was a living force. He was a welcome guest also at tennis parties and teas, and had once said "damn" quite out loud in the presence of Colonel Chase, who thought that very broad-minded for a clergyman. In general the colonel had a low opinion of

parsons since they had done nothing to check the abominable selfishness of the lower classes in striking and demanding a living wage, which had caused taxation to grow to such monstrous proportions. But Banks was an excellent fellow: except in church you would not know he was a padre at all. . . .

"A most calamitous thing has befallen us," said this broad-minded padre, "for Mr. Graves, the masseur, who was to entertain us with his most amusing stories to-morrow night, has gone to bed with influenza, and Dr. Dobbs absolutely forbids him to take part in our effort for the Children's Hospital to-morrow unless he thinks he will enjoy an attack of pneumonia."

The eyes of all the guests, which had been fixed on Mr. Banks, wheeled like a flock of plovers and settled on Mrs. Bliss. Would Mind (such was the instinctive though unspoken question) disperse Mr. Graves's influenza as it had done the colonel's cold? Mr. Banks, of course, could not be expected to understand what these earnest, inquiring glances meant, and though slightly disconcerted by thus suddenly losing everyone's attention, proceeded to make his appeal.

"Jolly rough luck just the day before our entertainment," he said, "but who knows whether there may not be a silver lining to our cloud? Everyone in Bolton has heard that we have among us, present here, a superb *raconteur,* and my committee unanimously deputed me to find out whether our friend Colonel Chase would not consent to take his place."

All eyes wheeled again to the colonel. Wonderful

though a demonstration of Mind over the masseur would have been, there was no need for it now.

"Oh, what a treat that would be," said Mrs. Oxney. "Often and often I've felt quite selfish when Colonel Chase has been telling his wonderful stories to just a handful of listeners, to think how many people longed to hear him and didn't get the chance. Do, Colonel!"

"Oh, do!" said Miss Howard. "I sha'n't feel nearly so nervous if I'm to follow you, for everyone will be in such a good temper. Padre, you must persuade him."

Florence added her appeal.

"Wouldn't that be lovely, Papa?" she said. "You would have to make an effort to go. Oh, do, Colonel Chase!"

A fugue on the subject of "Oh, do" followed.

"Upon my soul," said Colonel Chase, highly gratified but tremulous, "my little twopenny stories are only fit for a friend's ear, just to pass the time. Really in public, you know, and on a platform it's a very different matter!"

A wail of "Oh, do" went up in a minor key.

"Think how many more people will come," said Mrs. Oxney, "though to be sure Miss Howard's name alone would fill the hall. There won't be standing room."

"And all for the poor little children in hospital."

"And helping others," said Mrs. Bliss, who had been quite ready to adopt the unspoken suggestion that she would bring Mind to bear upon Mr. Graves's influenza, till this proposition was made.

"And poor Mr. Graves lying there and worrying him-

self over what will happen if no one can be found to take his place."

"And so much more amusing than Mr. Graves could possibly be."

"And how we shall all shudder if you tell your ghost story, and how we shall laugh if you tell us about the dean and the port wine."

("And what Slam said about your declaration of two hearts," whispered Tim to Mrs. Holders.)

"And the tiger! What suspense for those who haven't ever heard it."

It was not in human nature to resist so universal an appeal. Colonel Chase saw himself on the platform before a tense audience.

"Indeed, I hardly like to refuse——" he began.

The wailing strains of "Oh, do" swelled to a joyful chorus.

"Well, I yield, I yield," he said. "I am not too proud to fill a gap at the last moment. But my work's cut out for me. I shall have to rehearse my little yarns over and over again to get them shipshape by to-morrow night. Short notice, you know, Padre. Miss Howard's lucky only to be improvising."

"Oh, but you know them all by heart," said Mrs. Oxney. "Tell them all just as you tell them to us after tea. Perfect."

Mr. Banks warmly shook the colonel's hand and hurried back to relieve his committee's suspense with the joyful news, while Colonel Chase, abandoning all thought of a walk, retired to the smoking room to jot

down his selection of stories and trim them into public shape. He was immensely gratified at the strong expressions of entreaty and delighted anticipation which he had heard from those who knew his stories so well, and promised to give his audience something better worth listening to than the yarns with which Mr. Graves entertained the victims of his professional manipulations. (Probably they only laughed at them because Mr. Graves was running his fingers over ticklish places in their anatomy.) So much, too, lay in the address and appearance of the *raconteur,* and it was pleasant to remember that Mr. Graves was a podgy little bit of a man with no presence at all, and a wheezy voice. . . . "We'll begin with a good laugh," he thought: the Curate's Egg would lead off well; and he recited to himself with appropriate gestures of a man wielding an egg spoon the story of the curate breakfasting with his bishop, and being given an egg which smelt abominable ("something like the waters here," thought the colonel) and, on his diocesan making inquiries, how the curate said that parts of it were excellent. Very likely that gem had never reached Bolton yet, or, on the other hand, it might have reached Bolton so long ago that the majority of his audience would be too young to recollect its vogue. After that might come the story of the man-eating tiger which he stalked on foot through the jungle and shot as it charged him. Then for relief he would tell them of the dean who gargled with port wine by mistake; but perhaps two stories making fun of the cloth would be injudicious with

Mr. Banks in the chair, and he decided to tell instead the story of the little boy who took a sip of his father's whisky and soda, and not liking the taste put it back in the glass. That had amused Mr. Banks before now. After that he must make the flesh of his entire audience creep, and the ghost story of the dak-bungalow would be the very thing. It was rather a long story, but he had no reason to suspect that anyone had ever found it so, and if the lights could be turned down during it, and Miss Howard would play a little weird music on the piano during the most thrilling section, the effect would be quite terrific. Then up would go the lights again and he would make them hold their sides over the member of Parliament who thought he had sat down on his neighbour's hat, and in the middle of his profuse apologies found that it was his own. How his junior officers used to roar when he told them that story at mess. But he must be careful to omit the swear words to-morrow: that was a pity.

These ought to be enough, he thought, and, as an encore, he could tell the history of the young grocer who meaning to send a beautiful rose to his young lady, sent by mistake a piece of strong gorgonzola, inclosing an amorous note saying "When I smell it I think of you." The rose went—he might say—to a peppery old colonel not a hundred miles from here as per his esteemed order, and so the grocer lost his custom and his young lady. . . . He went through them all just as he meant to tell them to-morrow night, and found they had taken twenty-five minutes, which would do very well: but not

another yarn should they get out of him, however much they clamoured.

Then he went to look for Miss Howard to ask her to play the ghost music, but found she had gone to see about laying the carpet in the Green Salon. He followed her, for it was most important that she should make ghost music to his recitation, but learned that the carpet had been laid and Miss Howard had gone to the Assembly Rooms. He just looked into the Green Salon to see how her preparations progressed but was plunged into so thick a stew of opoponax, musk, and incense that it was impossible to breathe, let alone see anything. Violently coughing, he proceeded to the Assembly Rooms and there was Miss Howard seeing what it felt like to improvise on a platform. She readily consented to play weird music to accompany the ghost story, and a couple of workmen, who were arranging chairs for the entertainment to-morrow, sat down in them, so as not to make a "scraping sound" during this rehearsal of the famous adventures in the dak-bungalow. The climax approached——

"I was just about to light my lamp," said the colonel in a hollow voice, "when I saw or seemed to see in the far corner a shadow forming itself into the semblance of a man.... No, Miss Howard, I think I should like you to come in with those chords at the words 'far corner.' And the soft pedal, please. I shall be speaking in a very low voice myself, and I fear it would hardly carry. Shall we try that again?"

"I can't play much softer," said Miss Howard, "and the soft pedal has been on the whole time."

"Then perhaps we had better turn the piano away from the audience," said he. "Lend a hand here, one or two of you fellows, will you?"

"But my solo follows very soon after, Colonel," she said. "The piano must be moved back again."

"Oh, that's easily done: the padre and I will see to that. Now, Miss Howard, I'll begin again at 'light my lamp,' and your cue is 'far corner.' Now, please."

Once more the terrifying tale unfolded itself, and when the phantom shrieked, Miss Howard produced so fearful an effect with the loud pedal and both hands violently scampering up the piano that the colonel nearly jumped out of his chair.

"My word, how you startled me!" he said. "Most effective. Just like that to-morrow, please. And then dead silence, till the beat of the tom-toms is heard, on one note in the base very slow and measured.... Perfect.... And now let us take it all through again; we must get it without a hitch. Perhaps at the beginning we might have a line or two of 'On the Road to Mandalay,' just to give the local colour. Oh, much softer than that. Just a suggestion, fading away as I begin."

Now Miss Howard had come here on purpose to have a good practice and get used to the room and the instrument, and here she was tucked away behind the upright piano making ghost music for the colonel. Already it was growing dark, the chairs were all arranged, and the foreman was jingling his keys, wanting to lock up the

hall and get home. He had heard the ghost story three times and now he could not stand it again.

"We're closing the hall for the night, sir, now," he said.

Colonel Chase forgot about Mind for the moment and was highly indignant.

"Well, upon my soul!" he said. "We're doing our best to give you a good entertainment for your Children's Hospital and we're told we're not wanted. It's enough to make——"

Suddenly he remembered about his cold and his pedometer.

"Just give us two minutes more, there's a good fellow," he said. "And perhaps you'd be so kind as to go to the far end of the room and tell me if you can hear. . . . That's capital of you. . . . Now, Miss Howard, I'm sure you don't want to keep anybody waiting . . . any more than I do. So let's practise the rest afterward and begin now at 'I was just about to light my lamp.' "

This thrilling section down to the phantom's shriek was rehearsed once more, and Colonel Chase called out to know if he had been heard.

"Not a word, sir," said the foreman cheerfully. "I heard the music though. And now I must really ask you——"

"Yes, yes, at once," said the colonel. "We can have another practice at home, Miss Howard. Let me see: I must have a table on the centre of the platform with a glass and a bottle of water. It would never do if I was to get hoarse, for in the story of the little boy and his

father's whisky I mean to use falsetto. And I hope there will be plenty of light: the play of the features counts for so much. The look of tension and terror in the tiger story: that would be quite lost if there was not enough light. But they must be turned down for the ghost story, and turned up immediately after it. That must be seen to by some trustworthy man."

The next day was a succession of hectic hours for Wentworth, since Colonel Chase, who had so intrepidly faced man-eaters and phantoms, found the prospect of facing an audience far more formidable. He recited his stories over and over again to rows of imaginary listeners in the smoking room, and manifested such want of control if disturbed that Mrs. Oxney put up a notice on the door of "Private." Miss Howard had similarly taken possession of the drawing room, and in spite of her confidence in Mind, found that the passage of octaves to usher in the reëntry of the Chopin waltz was fading gradually but firmly out of her memory, and that constant repetition only served to hasten that distressful process. In order to fix these fugitive beauties in her mind (since Mind seemed so inconsistent an ally) she wrote down some of the most important on music paper, though, as her performance was improvised, it would hardly do to play from notes when the time came. Occasionally she closed her eyes and smiled, but the smile grew very wan as its inefficacy manifested itself.

Then Colonel Chase wanted to go through the music

of the ghost story once or twice more, and it got muddled up with the octaves, which now came out like the sun from behind a cloud when she wanted something else, and he forgot the cue he had given her of "the far corner," and said "the other end of the room." In consequence there were no weird chords at all, for she was waiting for "far corner."

"Music, please," rapped out Colonel Chase.

"But my cue is 'far corner,' " said Miss Howard in a strangled voice.

"Well the other end of the room is the same thing," he said. "A little intelligence, Miss Howard. The point is that the ghost is just appearing, and you have to play. I should have thought that was clear. Let us go back to the lighting of the lamp."

Miss Howard moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. She often did this when determined, under any provocation, to behave like a perfect lady.

"My mistake no doubt," she said. "The lighting of the lamp: yes."

This time she came in with the shriek-motif far too soon, and Colonel Chase, with his nerves worn to fiddle strings at the prospect of this evening, stamped on the floor with his great feet.

"Good gracious me!" he exclaimed. "It gets worse and worse. We had better have no music at all than this hash."

Miss Howard merely closed the lid of the piano.

"I think that would be far the best course," she said,

and sat with her hands in her lap looking at the ceiling till he left the room. Then she opened the piano again and went on with her practice.

Colonel Chase went back to the smoking room in an ague of passion and nervousness. He told the ghost story again to himself but now he had got so accustomed to the music that it put him out dreadfully not to have it, and a frenzied effort at reliance on Mind had no calming effect whatever. Though he hated to do it, he felt he must eat humble pie and beg Miss Howard to forgive him, for he could not get on at all without her. Perhaps Mrs. Oxney would convey his regrets: that would make the humble pie less hard to swallow. She consented to do her best.

Miss Howard had a sense of dignity and when the ambassadress, with many compliments on the exquisite music, sidled into the drawing room, she met with a cool reception.

"I am very glad that Colonel Chase feels that he has behaved most rudely," said Miss Howard. "It is his place to tell me so himself. Thank you, Mrs. Oxney."

And she resumed the long shake for the right hand which led toward the Chopin waltz. The octaves went better now, and having given ample time for Colonel Chase to come and apologize, she went out for a stroll in the bright sunshine, strenuously denying malice, nervousness, and loss of memory. Naturally she had to be unconscious of his presence at lunch, but that was only proper. He had no existence for Miss Howard: how then could she see him?

Another half hour's solitary rehearsal in the smoking room broke Colonel Chase down: he could not manage the ghost story at all without those weird chords. He apologized in person and they went through it twice more. After tea they sat with Mrs. Bliss in a row and demonstrated over the entertainment. Mr. Kemp and Florence were demonstrating too, he over his left hip and Florence over her need for Miss Howard as a friend, and they all parted to dress, calm and confident.

Dinner was early that night, for the entertainment began at a quarter to eight "for" eight, whatever that meant. Colonel Chase had pinned a quantity of medals and ribands to his evening coat, among which Mrs. Holders swore she detected an ordinary shilling with a hole in it. The assembly room was packed all but the front row, where seats were reserved for the party from Wentworth, and the four centre ones, so Mr. Banks excitedly told them, for the Dowager Countess of Appledore and her party. She had sent in from Bolton Grange that afternoon to order them, with the intimation that she might be a few minutes late. As she was patroness of the Children's Hospital, Mr. Banks was sure that this signified that the entertainment was not to begin without her and her party. He and Town Councillor Bowen had arranged to receive her at the door, and he hoped that Colonel Chase would assist them. So they all three waited for the august arrivals in a strong draught for a quarter of an hour. Then the glad word went about that the motor from the Grange had arrived and an awed silence settled on the rest of the front row.

The reception committee bowed and smiled and an icy blast swept Lady Appledore and party into the hall. In number and splendour she and her party were disappointing, for they consisted of two women so wrapped up in cloaks and scarves and capes and woollies that nothing whatever could be seen of them. They were then partially unwound by the reception committee, and the bleak and wintry features of Lady Appledore, whose face resembled a frost-bitten pansy, with all its markings huddled up together in the middle, were disclosed. "Party" was her companion, Miss Jobson, whose life was spent in holding skeins of wool for her, reading books to her, and sitting opposite to her in the motor. Lady Appledore then nodded to Mr. Banks to signify that she was ready, and the choir of St. Giles's Church sang a lullaby and a drinking song amid indescribable apathy.

Colonel Chase's moment had arrived: Miss Howard slipped into her place behind the piano, and Mr. Banks introduced the gallant colonel whose stories were so well known to everybody by repute (and, he might have added, to Wentworth by repetition). The gallant colonel, like Horatio of old, had thrown himself into the breach caused by the lamented absence of Mr. Graves, and so they were going to taste what he might call the choicest of Colonel Chase's anecdotal vintages for themselves.

Wentworth violently led the otherwise tame applause, and Colonel Chase, whose ruddy face had faded to the hue of the cheapest pink blotting paper, told them about

the curate's egg. Wentworth rocked with laughter, but Mrs. Oxney heard Lady Appledore say to her companion: "I am never amused, Miss Jobson, at jokes about the Church," and she remembered with dismay that the story of the dean was coming and that her ladyship was the daughter of one. She whispered her apprehension to her sister, who felt sure that Colonel Chase intended to substitute the story of the little boy and his father's whisky. That would be far more suitable, for Lady Appledore was a savage teetotaller.

The narrator embarked on the story of "My Encounter with the Man-eater," which had so often frozen the blood of Wentworth. But the audience, with the curious unanimity of crowds, had made up their minds, after the curate's egg, that he was a comic, pure and simple, and the crack-jaw Indian names and allusions to tiffin and chota-hazri and shikaro produced little titters of delighted laughter. They became more and more certain of it as he bade them follow him (he was "kidding" them) into the pathless solitary jungle with the kites whistling overhead (here some dramatic boy at the back whistled piercingly between his fingers) and up the dry nullah-wallah. "All at once," said the colonel, pointing to the wings, "I heard a rustle in the bushes close by me, and turning I saw within a few yards of me the gleaming eyes and flashing teeth of the man-eater." . . . He whisked round, making the movement of putting his rifle to his shoulder, and at that moment the performing dog, which had escaped from its master, leaped onto the stage and sat up and begged. . . . So loud

a roar of delighted laughter went up from the entire hall that no one ever knew whether the man killed the man-eater, or the man-eater the man. As it slowly subsided amid sporadic cackles, a yelp or two from the performing dog denoted that somebody was "larning" it to be a tiger.

The story of the little boy and the whisky pleased Lady Appledore very much. "A teetotaller for life, I expect," she said to Miss Jobson. "I should like some more stories of that sort."

Colonel Chase sat down for a moment after this, and drank a little water out of the glass in which he had pretended, as a little boy, to put back the whisky. This took the audience's fancy tremendously, and he couldn't conceive why. He was in so strange a mental state that even Mrs. Bliss, the interpreter of Mind, would have found him hard to treat. He was simmering with fury at the story of the man-eater having been received with those ribald gusts of laughter, and felt sure that he would have gripped his audience, and made them catch their breath with suspense, had not that wretched mongrel bounded onto the stage at his climax. On the other hand the roars of laughter and applause which had greeted him went to his head like wine and he hardly knew whether to be elated or indignant. He rose to tell his ghost story, and little did they think what terrors and goose-flesh were coming: then, on the encore he would restore them with the tale of the grocer.

The little boy with the whisky had rather damped the spirits of his audience, but on the announcement of

"My own ghost" they brightened up again, and cheerfully beat time to the first few bars of "On the Road to Mandalay."

"In the year 1895," said Colonel Chase, "I was stationed at Futipur-Sekri, and by the order of his Excellency the Viceroy——"

The quicker-witted parties of his audience began to laugh. It was like Mr. George Robey saying, "The last time I had tea with the King." They knew the sort of thing that was coming. Colonel Chase drew himself up and fingered his medals. So like George Robey.

"By the order of his Excellency the Viceroy," said Colonel Chase rather severely, "I was sent into the district of Astmetagaga to make a report on the discontent among the Bizributmas. Ballialonga, the capital of the Bizributma tribe, was three days' journey from Futipur-Sekri, and I had to sleep at two dak-bungalows on the way. Just before sunset on the day of which I am speaking I came in sight of the dak-bungalow of Poonapadra, and sent my khitmatgar on with a couple of coolies to cook my dinner, and deal with superfluous cobras."

"Really very good," said Lady Appledore to Miss Jobson, "a perfect parody of Mr. Kipling. I am sure something very comical is coming."

Colonel Chase could not hear what she said, but saw that both she and Miss Jobson had their eyes fixed on him in avid attention.

"The khitmatgar was in the cook house when I arrived," said he, turning slightly toward the piano to show Miss Howard that her cue was imminent, "and

night was at hand. My table was laid, and I was just about to light the lamp, when I saw at the other end of the room—I mean, in the far corner"—the piano punctually emitted a moaning wail, and Colonel Chase raised his voice a little—"a gray shape forming itself into the semblance of a man. As the lamp burned brighter——"

"You 'aven't lit it yet, mister," said some precisian from the back——

"—burned brighter," repeated Colonel Chase, "I saw the dread form with greater distinctness, and my heart stood still. It was clothed in ragged garments, sparse, elfin locks hung over its forehead—Forehead," said he, looking wildly round for the man whose duty it was at this particular moment to switch off all the lights in the hall except one close above the platform, by which the audience could see his face of horror surrounded by darkness, "and blood dripped from a jagged wound in its throat. Slowly it detached itself from the wall and advanced on me——"

Every single light went out, including that above the platform, and the man at the switches, seeing his mistake, put them all on again. The laughter became general, but, as it were, expectant, holding itself in for the climax.

"—towering ever higher as it approached. Cold sweat broke out on my forehead, my throat was dry as dust——"

" 'Ave a drink," said a delighted voice.

"—my knees trembled, and I knew that the powers

of hell were loose. 'Avaunt,' I cried, 'in the name of God, avaunt.' The phantom shrieked——"

Miss Howard, whose hands were poised above the keys, struck a tremendous ascending arpeggio, the end of which was drowned in a roar of laughter. The hall hooted with inextinguishable joy; never was there such a comic as the colonel.

After this stupendous success, Colonel Chase should have stopped: to tell the story of the grocer was to whitewash the lily. But it seemed to quiet the audience again, though when Mr. Banks in a fruity baritone melodiously bade them come fishing since to-morrow would be Friday, there were cheerful dissentients who reminded him it would be Thursday. He most obligingly accepted the correction in the second verse, and in the third said it would be Tuesday, which gave much satisfaction. He at once sang an encore, and then hurried to the "artists' room," where Dr. Dobbs was arranging top hats and canaries and handkerchiefs, and put it tactfully to the owner of the performing dog that as that intelligent animal had already scored the success of the evening as the man-eater, and as Lady Appledore had kept them waiting so long, would it be possible to reserve dear little Toby's performance for the next entertainment at Christmas. Toby's master, with some asperity, said that it would not only be possible but probable that Toby's next performance would be reserved for ever and ever, and left by the back door in high dudgeon.

Slightly crushed by this severity, Mr. Banks stole

back on tiptoe to hear the piano solo. Miss Howard had begun splendidly, and with dreamy eyes fixed on the ceiling and head a little on one side to catch the messages from the harmonious spirits of the air, was improvising that charming fragment from the waltz of Chopin with delicacy and precision. Then she closed her eyes and sunk her head over the pensive section by moonlight, and made everybody feel that to-morrow would be Monday, so Sunday-like was the chorale that toothache had inspired. She opened her eyes again, and was wreathed in smiles as the spirits of the air suggested to her that pretty series of the long shake and the crossing arpeggios, but next moment those nearest her might have observed a slightly glazed look coming over her face, as the magnificent fortissimo passage for octaves in both hands drew near. She tried to calm herself by letting her eyes stray about to show her complete mastery of her task: now they glanced at Lady Appledore, now at Florence, who was leaning forward toward her with a look of yearning ecstasy, rather disconcerting. Now she was among the octaves, but for the life of her once more she could not remember how she rescued herself from this tempestuous sea and slid into the calm waters of the Chopin waltz again, and she projected anxious thoughts into the rapidly approaching future, instead of trusting to Mind or at least her memory to prompt her when she came to that point. She wished passionately that she had not improvised this fine passage at all: it would have been so easy to go straight into the Chopin waltz from the chorale. Her agitation increased,

and the octaves grew faster and louder: she missed a change of key and found herself with fingers already aching with fatigue, apparently committed to thunder forth fortuitous octaves with both hands till she swooned with the exertion. In vain she thought of Mrs. Bliss, in vain she stretched her mouth in an agonized smile and denied octaves and improvisation and forgetfulness and fatigue and anything else that came into her head. Her face was getting crimson, and yet she couldn't stop, and if she could she would now be unable to recollect even the Chopin waltz. Finally, in absolute despair she took her hands off the notes, hurled them at the piano again in three crashing chords and rose. The moment she was on her feet she remembered exactly what the transition should have been, but now it was too late. . . . After the tremendous din that had been going on the applause sounded but faint, except for Florence's indefatigable smacks.

Long before the hour for collection and carriages, Wentworth, collectively, had been puzzling over what its demeanour to Colonel Chase should be. He was sitting a little apart from the rest, and sideway glances at him observed that he appeared slightly morose, or as if he was puzzling too. There was no doubt that he had won the success of the evening, but that success had been purchased with strange coin, for his humorous tales had produced depression, and in others the suspense and terror which it had been his firm intention to evoke had roused gales of laughter. Not even the excitement of seeing how much dowager countesses gave to

collections, nor the pained disgust to observe that this one considered sixpence ample, put this difficult problem of demeanour out of Mrs. Oxney's mind, and her sister, whom she consulted in whispers, was utterly at a loss: Mrs. Bertram merely shook her head sadly and thought it very awkward. Should they congratulate him on his success, or execrate the odious light-mindedness of the audience, or ignore the whole affair and talk lightly about the weather?

There they all were then, in a rather tense group, waiting for Lady Appledore's motor to start and leave the entrance clear for the Wentworth bus. The reception committee, including Colonel Chase, was bowing its thanks to her for her distinguished patronage and her sixpence, and it was Lady Appledore herself who solved the problem for them.

"I so much enjoyed your very amusing stories, Colonel Chase," she said. "Did I not, Miss Jobson? The ghost! Quite killing! How I laughed! And the man-eater. What a clever little dog to come in just when you told it. Beautifully trained! And the comic music for the ghost! Most humorous!"

Now two courses were open to Colonel Chase. He might either turn livid with passion and tell Lady Appledore that she was as contemptible as the rest of the yokels who had laughed when they should have shuddered, yawned when they should have laughed, or he might adopt Lady Appledore's heresy as orthodox, and promulgate it, so to speak, as his own official bull. The fact that he was a snob to the bottom of his appendix and

soberly considered countesses to be of a clay apart was perhaps the determining factor which settled the puzzling question of his demeanour. He bowed again and all his medals jingled.

"Delighted to have afforded you a little amusement, Lady Appledore," he said in a voice that Wentworth could hear. "We had many a laugh in the mess when I told my ghost story."

That, of course, settled the matter for Wentworth, and when he rejoined his party everybody knew exactly what line to take. That he had told the two thrilling tales of the man-eater and the ghost often and often before, and that they had been received with shudders and gasps and tremblings, and protests from Mrs. Oxney that she wouldn't dare to go to bed to-night, must now be forgotten: from henceforth, world without end, these were comic stories, and Wentworth would scream with laughter at all the points where hitherto it had frozen with horror.

"Oh, Colonel," said Mrs. Oxney, "what a treat you gave us! You made me ache with laughing. How we all enjoyed it! You never told them so wonderfully. Miss Howard, too! Her comic accompaniment: how you must have practised it together. And then your lovely improvisation afterward, Miss Howard, all coming to you on the spur of the moment like that! At one moment I thought the inspiration was going to fail you, but how foolish of me to have been alarmed. Those grand chords at the end! You two made the whole success of the evening, and Mr. and Mrs. Banks of course as

well," she hastily added at the approach of these artists. "The violin: such a sweet instrument! And to-morrow will be Tuesday or Wednesday: I declare I don't know what to-day is after that. And 'Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night!' What a heroine! She deserved the Victoria Cross at least. And your dear little choir boys singing so beautifully, and of course—good evening, Dr. Dobbs—Dr. Dobbs's wonderful conjuring tricks. I couldn't see how any of them were done, and fancy the Countess of Appledore only giving sixpence!"

The official and orthodox view could not have been more ably stated, and after a pleasant little refection of sandwiches and cake in the lounge, with some hot soup for the artists, who must be exhausted with their efforts, Colonel Chase was induced to give them the ghost story again (new style) with piano accompaniment. Mrs. Holders had not been to the entertainment and to her unbounded astonishment she heard the shuddering and gruesome tale received with hoots of merriment. This was quite inexplicable and almost more so was the evident satisfaction of Colonel Chase.

"Well, a good laugh does us no harm now and again," he said, "and I must say that I was pleased with the quickness with which the audience took my points. Nothing so depressing for the entertainer as to find that his humour is not appreciated. Lady Appledore—a charming woman—said she had enjoyed my little stories immensely. Very kind of her, I'm sure. I must bicycle over to the Grange some day soon and leave my card."

"And Miss Howard's playing, too, Mrs. Holders,"

continued Mrs. Oxney, who wanted everyone to feel happy and appreciated. "You did miss something there. Quite a sensation! How I should like to hear it again! You ought to write it down, Miss Howard, you ought indeed, so that your inspiration shouldn't be lost, and that others might play it as well if they had the fingers, though I'm sure only the most superior pianists could do it. What an evening of enjoyment! And the picture exhibition to look forward to next week."

"But fancy the Countess of Appledore only giving sixpence," said Mrs. Bertram, on whom this miserly incident had made the deepest impression. "I thought that was a very paltry sum indeed, and I could hardly believe my eyes. Sixpence, and Miss Jobson nothing at all."

Colonel Chase went up to bed satisfied that he had acted for the best in taking the verdict of the audience (especially when indorsed by a countess) as final. He had gone through the most poignant emotions that evening, in which rage and disgust were the keenest. His feelings when the house began to laugh at the story of the tiger were indescribable, and when that miserable little terrier came onto the platform and begged he would willingly have shot it, had the imaginary rifle in his hands suddenly materialized; and when the house again rocked with merriment at this ghost story he would, had the rifle undergone a further transmutation into a machine gun, have felt the greatest satisfaction in mowing them down in swathes, beginning with a countess. Then his comic stories had failed altogether (these

rustic audiences had the most perverted sense of humour) and probably no more deeply chagrined a reciter had ever stepped down from a platform. He really could not see how to face Wentworth at all: it is true they had not laughed, except in the right places, and when others laughed they had worn expressions of pain and sympathy, and throughout the remainder of the entertainment he had been thinking of some very severe things to say about being subjected to the insults of an unmannerly mob. Then, owing to Lady Appledore's comments, he had seized his opportunity and mounted the throne of the supreme comic artist. It was like a conjuring trick, one of Dr. Dobbs's best.

As he undressed and did his valuable exercises, puffing out his chest and bending till he touched his toes, he wondered if a more surprising success had ever come to a man out of ruinous failure. Wentworth, too, had caught on at once and had laughed at the repetition of the ghost story just now as if they had never known what it felt like to shudder. . . . And then suddenly the thought of Mrs. Bliss came to him. She had told him that if only he relied on Mind, in his kind and unselfish efforts in aid of the poor children in hospital, they must be crowned with brilliant success. That had certainly happened, though as a matter of fact the poor children in hospital had not even so much as entered his head, since he was first approached by Mr. Banks. And then he remembered also that Mrs. Bliss's Mind was often inscrutable in its workings: the aspirations of those who trusted it were always fulfilled, but mortal sense could never

accurately predict the manner of it. Certainly he had never expected that Mind would fulfil his aspirations by causing his audience to peal with laughter at what had been designed to make their flesh creep, and when their first giggles broke out, he had determined to have nothing more to do with Mind. But now that apparent failure wore a very different aspect, one that could only be accounted for by the theory of inscrutable dealings. "Upon my word," he said to himself as he got into bed, "I'll look into it all a bit further. My cold, my pedometer, and now this! It all seems to hang together in the most marvellous fashion."

Mr. Banks came up to Wentworth again next day to see Colonel Chase, full of congratulations and with a further request to make.

"Stupendous, Colonel," he said, "you were simply stupendous last night. There were some nurses there from the children's hospital, and they told me, on my visit there this morning, that they'd never laughed so much in all their born days. 'Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight' seems to have pleased them too, but that's neither here nor there."

"Remarkably fine, I thought," said Colonel Chase, who could easily afford to commend minor lights.

"Very good of you to say so: I thought I gripped the audience. Well, the matron charged me to ask if you wouldn't very kindly give the story of the tiger and the ghost in the wards. Poor little mites, you know: they've got small cause for laughter in their lives, and it really would be most good of you."

Colonel Chase was highly gratified, and good-naturedly abandoned his walk and went to the hospital that afternoon. The matron thought she could introduce her cat into the tiger story to take the place of that clever dog, while it was in course of narration, for it was a lethargic cat, usually asleep, and good at staying exactly where it was put: she could put it down on one of the beds quite quietly. It was thought better to feed the cat first, for after food, sleep was assured, so would the colonel begin with the ghost story? The children were all agog with pleasure and excitement at the prospect of hearing the funny man.

The nurses, already tittering at what was coming, preceded the funny man into the first ward, and he began his ghost story. But the effect was highly disastrous: child after child broke into shrieks of terror and dismay, nurses hurried from bed to bed to comfort their howling occupants and assure them that they shouldn't be frightened any more, and the matron had to beg the colonel to leave the ward without delay. So, within ten minutes of his arrival, he was on his way back to Wentworth in a state of complete bewilderment as to whether the ghost story was terrible or comic: its effect seemed to be wholly incalculable. And surely Mind was acting again in the most inscrutable manner.

He stalked into the lounge where Mrs. Bliss was sitting. She hailed him with her widest smile.

"There you are, Colonel!" she said. "How kind and dear of you to have sacrificed your walk. How the poor

little mites must have enjoyed it! What brightness you have brought into lives full of Error! I've been demonstrating over the pleasure you have been giving ever since you started. Tell me all about it!"

Colonel Chase's suspicions about Mind deepened to real distrust. But perhaps Mrs. Bliss could explain it.

"I can't make it out," he said. "I meant to give pleasure but when I got to the ghost forming itself in the far corner the children burst into sobs and howls. The matron hurried in and asked me to go away at once. Very disconcerting. What do you make of it?"

Mrs. Bliss was not in the least disconcerted.

"Poor little mites!" she said. "You see they are surrounded with thoughts of illness: everything round them suggests illness: doctors, nurses, materia medica, and as you know now it is all Error. You came in, radiating Mind, and Error boiled up to the surface, violent for the moment, but dispersing rapidly. It often happens like that. All is Mind: Mind is all. Terror and evil and sickness flee before it. There is no reality in them. There is a wonderful page or two about it in the Manual."

She picked up the Manual, and turned quickly over the pages.

"Yes, here it is," she said. "Shall I read it? Sweet words and so true! 'Often when Error is brought under the influence of Mind, there takes place a chemicalization. Error surges to the surface only to be instantly dis-

persed. An apparent relapse may occur, and this is often the first sign that the healing process is going on.' Quite convincing is it not? The dear little mites will be so much better in consequence of your visit. I am so glad you went."

CHAPTER VI

For the rest of the week Miss Howard had very little time to attend to Mind, and just about as little inclination. She considered that Mind had shown the greatest inattention to her improvisation: she had committed herself and it to Mind with the complete trust that a passenger puts in the engine driver when he makes a journey by train, and there had been an accident. Not only had she quite forgotten the end of the passage for octaves, but there had been no sign whatever of an encore, whereas Colonel Chase, who had already been cured of a cold, the tantrums, and the loss of a pedometer, had been loaded with benefits. It was not fair, and though Mrs. Bliss assured her that those last few chords would linger forever in her memory like the sound of a great Mental Amen, Miss Howard would far sooner have got back into the Chopin waltz and finished according to plan, than have so agreeably affected Mrs. Bliss. Besides, those chords composing the great Mental Amen would have come in anyhow.

Mind, too, was doing nothing for Mr. Kemp, and Mrs. Bliss's argument that his baths and massage were a materialistic hindrance to his recovery was met with the deadly parry that she was having baths and massage too and was improving enormously.

But she only smiled unweariedly and repeated that she only submitted to baths and massage for her husband's sake, and that they did not hinder her progress because she was quite sure that they had no effect whatever on her. But the fact of submitting to them (not the baths and the massages themselves) perhaps did her good for this was a sacrifice made to love, and Mind liked that. What did hinder progress was to have faith in materia medica, and wouldn't dear Mr. Kemp give up his treatment for a week, for he was still believing it might do him good, and see how much better he would be? It was clearly no use arguing with Mrs. Bliss, for she only smiled and said it all over again with loving pity (which was so exasperating), but every night, as he had a few sips of hot milk or a glass of lemonade without sugar, and a rusk, he argued the position out with Florence. Florence could not make up her mind either, and so after lengthy debate they sat with smiles and closed eyes, and since he was no better in the morning, he had his reclining bath as usual. Mr. Kemp in fact served both Mind and Mammon with equal devotion, and no reward from either.

But Miss Howard, during the few days that remained before the opening of her exhibition of pictures in the Green Salon, worked away, relying entirely on herself and not at all on Mind: she had become, for the time being, a rank a-mentalist. The question of prices was truly difficult, for she wanted to get as much as she could for her pictures but had not the vaguest idea what anybody would be willing to give. So instead of closing her

eyes and seeking guidance she looked at her pictures with a critical eye and eventually made the scale. Evening Bells, with a five-and-sixpenny frame, positively given away, was two guineas; Mrs. Oxney's cat under the title of Pussy-dear and Geraniums were one guinea, and everything else was half a guinea. This price list, to be produced on application, was intrusted to the care of one of the handsomest of the liveried pages at the baths (who generally spent their day in playing leapfrog with each other) whom Mr. Bowen guaranteed to be the brightest boy in Bolton. He was also given a roll of perforated paper, much like a roll of exceedingly narrow toilet paper, on each numbered section of which was printed an advertisement of Mr. Bowen, plumber, decorator, picture framer, and carpenter: these rolls were supplied by Mr. Bowen free of charge, for the sake of publicity. The leapfrog boy, thus made doorkeeper, cashier, and bureau of information, had merely to tear off one of these sections and hand it, on payment of sixpence, to the visitors to the Green Salon: the device seemed fool proof. But he had to be tactful as well, for if he observed a visitor looking very attentively at the exhibits he was to touch his cap with an insinuating smile and ask if he would like to see a price list. In his left-hand trousers pocket there was a pill box, thrown in gratis with "Souvenir d'Orient" by Mr. Amble, containing some minute red adhesive stars, and in case a picture was purchased he had to write down the name and address of the purchaser, and with a genteel application of the tip of his tongue to the adhesive star, affix

it to the corner of the picture, to indicate that it was sold. For these services he received a shilling a day in addition to the salary he earned from the Establishment for playing leapfrog.

The hanging of the pictures was a task no less difficult than their pricing: in some places the walls were so crumbly (owing probably to the action of the brine) that large flakes came away under the lightest impact of that useful little nail called the "small brad," while in others the walls were so adamantine (owing probably to the action of the rotten-egg water) that the "small brad" curled up and became a minute croquet hoop. In the end a taut copper wire had to be hung from corner to corner of the walls of the Green Salon, and the pictures hooked onto it. They had a tendency to sag toward the centre where the wire drooped a little. An advertisement appeared on Friday and Saturday in the Bolton *Gazette,* and Mr. Bowen, who was part owner of the paper, said he was confident that Miss Howard would not regret that little trifle of expense, when all was said and done. This was a dark oracular saying, but Mr. Bowen seemed quite certain about it.

By Saturday afternoon every picture was in its place: Evening Bells and Pussy-dear and Geraniums and Reflections and Lengthening Shadows and God's Acre and Bethesda and Healing Spring and Golf Links, Wentworth and Leafy Warwickshire and June's Glory and Suntrap and Frosty Morning and Dewy Eve and Harvest Moon and Gloaming and Beeches and Hawthorns and St. Giles's Church and Still Life and Matins and

Evensong and "Oh, to be in England now that April's here" and Campions and Sheep, Feeding and Mist in the Valley and Mist on the Hills and Swans and the Curfew tolls the knell of parting day and many others. Miss Howard then went through the pantomime of being a visitor with the custodian, who pretended to tear off a section of toilet paper quite correctly in return for her imaginary sixpence and looked seraphic as he sidled up to her while she examined Pussy-dear with close attention, and offered to show her the price list. The light through the scrubbed skylight was admirable, and after giving the Green Salon a final whiff of "Souvenir d'Orient," Miss Howard, in order to be on the safe side, closed her eyes and smiled, committing the entire undertaking, already terribly expensive, to Mind. The baths would be shut on Sunday and she would not look on her handiwork again till it was open to the inspection and the purses of the public. She hoped the purses would be open too.

To say that Miss Howard came down to breakfast on Monday with either appetite or confidence or calm would be highly misleading. She had passed a worried and wakeful night, and her rare snatches of sleep had been checkered by villainous dreams in which she saw with agony that she had hung all her pictures upside down, or that the Green Salon, crowded with dowager countesses of forbidding aspect, had no pictures at all on its walls, or that they were entirely occupied with one vast fresco representing Pussy-dear ringing Evening Bells. . . . She was early down after an unrefresh-

ing night, and no one else had yet appeared, but the papers had come in and there on her table was not only her usual periodical but a copy of the Bolton *Gazette*. She supposed that Mr. Bowen had sent it up, as he had done on Friday and Saturday, to show that the advertisement of her exhibition had duly appeared, but on the outside leaf he had written in arresting blue pencil, underlined, "See page 8," and accordingly she turned there. Big headlines that seemed to dance before her enraptured gaze instantly showed why she should turn to page 8. A column was entitled "Exhibition of Water Colours in the Green Salon at Bolton Baths." She read:

Seldom has a greater treat been afforded to lovers of the beautiful in Bolton (and we know there are many such) than this exhibition of Miss Alice Howard's water colours which opens to-day. For perfection of technique, for subtle and exquisite observation, for radiant fancy, for that nameless *je ne sais quoi* without which all art is as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, we doubt whether any modern artist can rival this gifted lady who has at last done justice to and conferred immortality on our lovely countryside. Nor are Miss Howard's truly poetical interpretations of nature confined to landscape alone: all lovers of the feline species will long to be the happy possessors of Pussy-dear, and we could have wished she had given us more animal studies. The Green Salon at the Baths, we are sure, will be thronged all day with eager purchasers. A veritable cabinet of gems.

The artist gave a gasp of delight. She had so lost herself in the perusal of this masterly and sympathetic account of her work that she had not observed that other guests had entered the dining room. There they sat at their tables, all silent, and all, oh wonder of wonders, immersed in the Bolton *Gazette*. Admirable Mr. Bowen,

whose oracular speech was now explained, must have sent copies of it to everyone at Wentworth.

Mrs. Bliss was the first to finish this eulogy, and catching Miss Howard's eye, blew her a kiss (which Florence thought a very forward proceeding) and pointed to it.

"Not half what you deserve, dear," she said. "But very nice as far as it goes. I told you how it would be. Mind!"

Murmurs of approval and applause came from other guests of the dining room as the breakfasters finished this little appreciation in the Bolton *Gazette,* and Mrs. Oxney said she felt quite upset at the thought that somebody else might purchase Pussy-dear before she had time to go down and snap it up. It was so tiresome that on Monday morning household affairs always detained her till lunch time. The simple expedient of paying Miss Howard a guinea and thus purchasing Pussy-dear without more ado did not seem to occur to her, and delicacy naturally prevented the artist from suggesting it. . . .

As for Miss Howard, now treading on air and with her appetite fully restored, she gobbled up her breakfast and hurried warbling away in order to get down to the baths by the time the Green Salon opened. She meant to go in and out with a busy but diffident air, and everyone who knew who she was would tell those who didn't, and she would be a Public Character. Her one regret at the moment after regarding the *Lobgesang* in the *Gazette* was that she had not priced all the pictures at double the modest sum that appeared on the list. Such modesty just now seemed almost morbid.

Shortly after she had left the dining room, Colonel Chase came down to breakfast, extremely late and in a worse temper than he had been in since Mr. Amble had failed to send his quinine and thermogene. He had been drinking his early morning tea and eating his toast when a furtive but adamantine piece of crust caused an important front tooth to part company from its parent plate. In itself that would have been no great inconvenience, for he had a beautiful row of uppers left, but he remembered with sad vividness how, only last night, when Mrs. Holders mentioned that she had to pay a visit to the dentist's, he had said, in his favourite rôle of the entirely robust and healthy man, "I never have any bother with my teeth, thank goodness." In a way that was quite true because, strictly speaking, he had not got any, but the inference which, he had no doubt, had been drawn was that he had got them all. So before he came down to breakfast he had spent a long time in front of his looking-glass making the mouth movements of speech and laughter to see whether the loss would be apparent. He thought it would pass undetected unless he incautiously allowed himself to be very much amused about something, but he was extremely annoyed about the occurrence and would have to go up to London some day soon. . . . Then, being in a hurry, he cut himself shaving, for he never condescended to the "safety mowing machines," as he contemptuously termed the modern type of razor. "I'm not afraid of the bare blade," he used to say. But he was very angry, just now, with the bare blade. . . .

These untoward incidents were quite enough thoroughly to ruffle a temper that was never very equable early in the day, and when, on sitting down to his breakfast, he demanded a couple of sausages, he was not soothed at being told by the parlour maid that there were none left: she recommended some "beautiful" bacon instead. He cast a glance of peculiar annoyance at the unsolicited copy of the Bolton *Gazette* which lay by his plate and opened it.

"What have they sent me this provincial rag for?" he muttered. "And why page 8? Some local charity, I'll be bound. Children's Hospital probably: I've had enough of the Children's Hospital. Hallo, picture exhibition . . ."

A sideways glance told him that Miss Howard was not present, and folding the paper back he emitted frequent pshaws and faughs as he read. Then he flung it on the floor.

Mrs. Bliss observed these signs of Error (there was no mistaking it) with tender regret, and put on her brightest smile as she rose from her meal and passed, hardly limping at all, close to his table. Error must not be allowed to poison the sweet morning.

"Such a lovely little notice of Miss Howard's pictures," she said. "So appreciative. Have you seen it?"

"Yes, indeed I have," said he, "and for myself I don't find it lovely. Ludicrous flattery, I call it, laid on with a spade. I wonder who wrote it, eh? A little suspicious——"

Quite suddenly as he said the word "suspicious" a

loud cheerful whistle sounded through the dining room. Everybody looked up, wondering where it came from. Colonel Chase himself thought that some rude person had interrupted him (as when the kites whistled in the tiger story) and angrily resumed:

"Our friend is indeed endowed with all the gifts," he said. "Pianist, artist, and now shall we add art critic, Mrs. Bliss?"

Once again came that piercing whistle, and Colonel Chase could not doubt, nor indeed could anybody else, that his own unwitting lips had produced it, through the gap in the front teeth. He realized at once that he must avoid sibilants (so difficult to do) as the gouty avoided sugar, and go up to London on business without delay, for his speech betrayed him. If he hurried he would be able to catch the ten o'clock train and be back to-night. Most annoying. The only bright spot, and that a small one, was that he could not go, at any rate to-day, to Miss Howard's exhibition, and if that eulogy he had just read was really by an unbiased hand, all the pictures ought to be sold by to-morrow. He gobbled up his bacon and found an urgent call to go to London among his letters.

All that morning and all that afternoon Miss Howard was diffidently gliding in and out of the Green Salon, and welcoming friends who came in to look at her pictures with little deprecating speeches, but nobly refraining from accompanying them round, for that would have made it difficult for them to avoid a purchase, and Miss Howard had a pride. But the custodian had his

eye on them, and whenever anyone lingered by God's Acre or Bethesda she saw him glide up to them with his insinuating smile and politely tell them of the existence of a catalogue of prices. Unfortunately this information only seemed to have the effect of making them hurry on, and she could not help noticing how as they neared the end of the exhibition they looked round to see if she was near and glided stealthily from the Green Salon in a way that suggested prisoners escaping. Once the custodian got as far as producing the pill box with the adhesive stars from his trousers pocket, but nothing came of it. It was all a little discouraging, and the raptures inspired by the notice in the Bolton *Gazette* gradually grew dim. Mrs. Bowen, however, was a tonic, for she made Miss Howard come all the way round with her, and poured forth a continuous stream of admiring comment.

"And there's St. Giles's Church again," she said. "I should know it anywhere. No. 9: what does the catalogue say about it? Reflections. There they are in the river. Beautiful—so clear! And what an enthusiastic notice, wasn't it, in the *Gazette,* though not a word too much. Mr. Bowen was sure you'd like that. It was written by a very clever young man on the staff, whom Mr. Bowen was kind to, not so long ago. He's not here to-day himself, and so busy that he was afraid he mayn't be able to pop in before closing time, and I shall get a fine scolding if I can't tell him all about the pictures. I do think he's made a good job of the frames: so quiet and tasteful, and showing them off, you may say, to the

best advantage. Why, if that isn't Mrs. Oxney's cat: I could recognize it and pick it out if there were fifty pictures of cats. What does the catalogue say about that? Pussy-dear. Not a doubt about it: so good-natured and never scratches. And Evening Bells: perhaps that's my favourite, but with so many lovely bits, I hardly know which I like best. How sweet any of them would look above my piano in the parlour. I must have one more look at Pussy-dear"—the custodian glided to her side—"but I mustn't deprive Mrs. Oxney of that, or she would be in a way about it."

The custodian ebbed sadly away.

As dusk fell, and closing time for the Green Salon approached, the custodian rendered his financial statement. There had been nineteen visitors, not including a deaf old gentleman who could not for a long time be made to understand that there was an entrance fee, and then retreated in high indignation, entirely declining to pay, but the toilet roll showed that twenty sections had been detached from it. This was accounted for by the custodian's confession that he had torn one off, not realizing that each symbolized sixpence, in order to roll himself a cigarette, for which purpose it was admirably fitted. Miss Howard paid him his shilling out of the takings of the day, and enjoined on him to revere the toilet roll. With the exception of Mrs. Oxney and Colonel Chase, all Wentworth had visited the Green Salon and Florence had been twice. Colonel Chase, so Miss Howard ascertained on her arrival there at tea time, had

gone up to London after breakfast and had not yet returned.

She was hailed with numerous congratulations, and by Mrs. Oxney with a profusion of valid excuses for her not having visited the Green Salon.

"Such a worry it has been to me all day, Miss Howard, that I haven't been able to get down. First there was the usual Monday settling up, and that took all my morning and half an hour after lunch as well. And then such a fuss in the kitchen, for the boot and knife boy, so good at his work but peppery, came late to his dinner, and cook refused to have the cold beef back, but said he must be content with bread and cheese, if he couldn't keep time. So there were words and cook came to me to know if it was by my wish that the boot and knife boy swore at her. Fancy! As if I had ever wished anything of the sort. And then when that was over there were the hot-water pipes in the smoking room leaking, just when I was thinking of putting on my hat and starting, and by the time the plumber had put them to rights it was getting dark."

"Then, oh, what a pleasure you will have to-morrow," said Mrs. Bliss. "I'm sure I could have spent all day in the Green Salon, going round and round it and seeing fresh beauties every time. Such refreshment! I went quite early, as I knew it would be crowded all day. How many visitors did you have, dear?"

"Nineteen, no twenty," said Miss Howard.

"I call that wonderful for the first day. Just wait a

few days till people have had time to tell each other what a treat is in store for them! There'll be quite a queue outside of those waiting to get in."

"And I hope my Pussy isn't sold yet," said Mrs. Oxney. "I should be miserable if anybody else got that."

"Let me see!" said Miss Howard, pressing her finger to her forehead. "No, I don't think it is. I can't remember seeing a red star on it."

"My favourite is Evening Bells," said Mrs. Bliss. "Such peace and poetry. How they'll all be snapped up!"

Florence liked Healing Springs best, and her father could not understand her preference for that over Bethesda. The discussion grew quite animated, and though it was gratifying to find them all taking such interest and pride in her work (Mrs. Bertram had cut out the notice in the Bolton *Gazette,* and was meaning to paste it into her scrapbook as a compliment to Wentworth), Miss Howard could have wished that just one of them had guarded against the certainty of a favourite being snapped up by snapping first. There seemed to be a lack of prudence in neglecting the opportunities of to-day, which might be gone to-morrow.

Next morning could scarcely rank as a morning at all, so dense and dark were the volleying clouds which swept down from the east, discharged their broadside of rain on Bolton, and hurried on to make room for fresh assailants. Colonel Chase had returned the night before, all smiles and no whistles, and it was evident that his business in town had been satisfactory. But even an old campaigner like himself, so he told Miss Howard at break-

fast, could not face the wrath of such weather, and, after the cold that had threatened him last week, he felt it wiser to postpone the pleasure of seeing her delightful pictures. Mrs. Oxney was full of similar lamentations, and though distraught at the notion of Pussy's picture being snapped up by somebody else, it still did not occur to her to telephone to the baths and bid the custodian affix the adhesive star to the treasure. Even Mr. Kemp preferred to miss another look at Bethesda, and see whether Mind would not do something striking for him as he sat close to the log fire in the lounge; and the bus went down with only two passengers in it: Mrs. Bliss, who for the sake of her husband was willing to brave any erroneous inclemency, particularly as it could not possibly hurt her, and Miss Howard.

The Green Salon was absolutely empty of art lovers, and the skylight was leaking a little onto Mrs. Oxney's nice carpet. Patients from neighbouring hotels and from Belvoir, Blenheim, and Balmoral came through the vestibule in dripping mackintoshes, and how much nicer it would be, thought Miss Howard, if it was they who were dripping onto Mrs. Oxney's carpet instead of the skylight. In fact the only focus of cheerfulness about the Green Salon was its custodian, who felt certain everyone would come flocking in as soon as the weather cleared: no one, in his opinion, could "have the heart to look at pictures, miss, on such a day." Miss Howard paid him his shilling before lunch, not meaning to return if the downpour continued, and inspected the sad integrity of the toilet roll. But it would never do to pre-

sent the appearance of a downhearted exhibitor, and after lunch she established herself in the lounge to make an indoor sketch. The perspective of the staircase was a most intricate problem, and no amount of sympathetic colour would make it look other than unscalable.

Though the old campaigner could not face the weather for the ten-minutes' walk to the baths to see the pictures he faced it that afternoon for a solid six miles by his pedometer, leaving and returning to Wentworth by the back door so that Miss Howard, sketching in the lounge close to the front door, should be ignorant of his perfidy. A good deal of diplomacy was needed in these manœuvres, for he had to get his mackintosh from the hall and take it up to his bedroom for the purpose of sewing a button on, and on his return, convey it by a roundabout route to the hot-water pipes outside the dining room in order to dry it. This done, he came thumping down to tea, flushed and rosy with exercise and successful trickery.

"I'm not one to complain of an occasional wet day," he said, "for I've got through some arrears and had a good spell of reading in my room—wonderful author, Macaulay: he gives you something solid to think about —and if anyone asked if I'd had a snooze as well I should change the subject."

"Nothing to be ashamed of, Colonel," said Mr. Kemp. "A nap during the afternoon has often been recommended to me. After the wear and tear of the morning, nature needs a restorative. I get sounder sleep sometimes in half an hour after lunch than I do in the

whole course of the night. At Buxton, it was part of my régime——"

"Well, it freshens one up," said Colonel Chase, who always interrupted Mr. Kemp's experiences at spas. "I feel brisk enough for anything now. We might have a rubber, perhaps, before dinner, now the day's work is over. The evenings are drawing in now: we can play with a good conscience, and not feel we're wasting daylight. Cards and candles, I always say."

Mrs. Oxney had entered as he spoke. She had just come along from the dining room, where she had been distributing the menu cards for dinner, and had seen Colonel Chase's mackintosh spread over the radiator and sending up clouds of steam.

"Well, that would be very comfortable," she said, "and if you want me to take a hand I'm ready. But to think of your having gone out on this miserable afternoon, Colonel. I'll be bound you had to make your pedometer tick briskly to keep yourself warm. And your mackintosh, why, you might have thrown it into the river; a button off, too, letting the wet in."

Mrs. Holders caught Tim's eye, who, trying to strangle a laugh, swallowed a crumb of cake by an unusual route and violently choked. This happily changed the subject, which Colonel Chase would certainly have had to do, for Mr. Kemp, who was an authority on false passages of all sorts, begged everybody not to pat Tim on the back, for such a well-meant treatment only made matters worse. He ought to sit bolt upright, breathe deeply in through the nose and expel the air vigorously

through the mouth. Everyone's attention was therefore diverted to Tim, and they watched him recover by degrees. Mrs. Bliss had clearly been demonstrating during his fit, so it was uncertain whether Mind or Mr. Kemp was responsible.

But though there was thus no definite further exposure of Colonel Chase's rank duplicity, everyone was aware of it, for no one could possibly forget that he had told Miss Howard that the weather was too bad for even so old a campaigner to venture out. It was no wonder that she moistened her lips several times and determined that nothing should drag from her the smallest comment on his most deceitful behaviour. What made his falsehoods more revolting to the feelings of a lady was the hearty and rollicking manner in which he said he had been reading in his bedroom and perhaps snoozed. But she scorned to return to the subject and ask him how many miles he had walked.

Morning brought a renewal of tranquil and sunny weather, and had it not been for her exhibition, Miss Howard would certainly have returned to lunch at Wentworth with a veritable "ode to autumn" in water colours to display on the chimney piece of the lounge. But she could not bear in these critical days to absent herself so long from the Green Salon, and she longed to know whether her custodian's optimism was justified in expecting an influx of visitors now that the improved weather conditions would give them the heart to look at

pictures. At present, when she arrived there soon after breakfast, there was only one visitor, a rather odious-looking young man, who, so the custodian secretly informed her, had refused to pay for admission on the grounds that he was the press. Instantly she was divided between high and low suspicions. Was he (rapturous thought!) "our own correspondent" of some influential London paper, sent down to study the contents of the Green Salon which the Bolton *Gazette* had found so exquisite, or was he some clever thief who intended, when the custodian's small back was turned, to cut out from their frames some of the choicest gems and dispose of them to shady dealers? He did not look like her idea of our own correspondent: on the other hand it would have been unlike a clever thief to have called attention to himself by saying that he was the press. In either case, he had better know who she was, for if he was the press he might like to have an interview, while if he was a thief, he would know that the artist had taken note of him. So she tripped up to him and gave him the benefit of the doubt.

"The press, I believe," she said. "I am Miss Howard. These little things of mine——"

The press had not very good manners: it did not remove from the corner of its mouth a cigarette whose fumes mingled strangely with the odour of the waters, perceptible this morning, and that of "Souvenir d'Orient."

"Pleased to meet you, miss," he said, "and pleased

to have given you a leg up in our organ the Bolton *Gazette*. I laid it on thick, didn't I? Just looked in to see what sort of a show you'd got. Very pretty, I'm sure."

"I thought your article was most sympathetic," she said. "And so pleased you've paid my little exhibition a second visit, after studying it so closely."

He looked much surprised.

"No, I've not been here before," he said. "I just had a look at the catalogue and wrote my stuff on that."

Poor Miss Howard felt her last support slip from her. Hitherto, she had clung to the comforting knowledge that though visitors might be few and purchasers completely extinct, the trained eye of the professional critic had appreciated and admired. Now that consolation was gone.

"You don't seem to have had any purchasers yet," went on this dreadful young man, "but I'll give you a tip about that, miss. You tell that young buttons who wanted me to pay sixpence to fix labels onto half of them to say they're sold, see? You bet other people will begin buying them then, for fear they should be too late. Just make them think that if they're not slippy everything'll be gone, see? I must be off, though: wish you luck."

For some time after the departure of this dreadful young man there were no other visitors. The optimism of the leapfrog boy had to exert its ingenuity, and he supposed that on such a fine morning gents would want to be out of doors. It seemed, in fact, as if gents required very unusual weather to make them feel drawn to pic-

ture exhibitions; neither fine nor wet suited them. Miss Howard had one or two bill-paying errands in the town, and on her return she found that Mrs. Oxney had been in, though there was no token of her visit on the glass of Pussy-dear, but only a message of ardent appreciation. Colonel Chase evidently was one of the gents who wanted to be out of doors, for the custodian had seen him riding by on his bicycle, as if for a wager, and Miss Howard supposed she would be asked to guess at lunch time what the new record was. Though she had no malice (or very little) in her spiritual outfit, she determined to guess either that he had been eighty miles, which would make his actual accomplishment appear a very paltry feat, or ten miles, which would show that she had a very poor idea of his powers.

Meantime the diabolical tip given her by the press continued to leaven her thoughts. She had rejected the notion at first with scorn as being a dishonest trick, but soon she began to wonder whether there was any harm in it. As long as no one bought her pictures, she might be considered to have bought them herself, for they *were* hers, and certainly she had now bought and paid for the frames. She did not know what the custodian would think of her if she suddenly told him to put little red stars on half the pictures, but, after all, it mattered very little what the custodian thought of her. On the other hand, it would be a great chagrin if having starred "Oh, to be in England now that April's here" some visitor took a violent fancy to it, and found it was sold. She hated deceit, at least she had felt that Colonel Chase

had made himself truly contemptible when he had said yesterday that the inclement weather prevented him going to see her pictures, and was detected in having gone out for a walk instead, but was it deceit to put red stars on pictures? She did not actually state that they were sold, though the custodian if asked what this decoration meant would doubtless tell inquirers that such was its significance. But again, if nobody further came to see the pictures (a contingency which was beginning to look lamentably likely) nobody would be deceived. Her fingers itched for the pill box, but she could not quite face asking the boy for it. She would wait one day more, and if by that time there were still no purchasers she would buy five or six herself. . . .

It was getting on for lunch time: all the morning patients at the baths had passed and repassed the open door of the Green Salon, but only one of them, an elderly lady like a horse, had even paused there. Instantly the custodian, who was beginning to wonder whether a shilling a day compensated him for so much inactivity, sprang to attention with the toilet roll, but the horse only tossed its head with a sort of neigh, and muttered "only pictures" in a tone of deep disgust. Miss Howard felt she could not stand the kindly and cheerful inquiries that would be put to her if she drove up with the Wentworth bathers in the bus, and she started to walk. Outside on the wall of the porch there was a typewritten advertisement of the exhibition, which the rain yesterday had partly detached so that the upper half of it drooped over the lower, and the print had run: she had hardly

the spirit to fix it up again. . . . She was thoroughly depressed, for apart from the expense and from the approaching difficulty of knowing what to do with a stack of nearly fifty framed pictures, there was the far more bitter loss of prestige. As long as she had not tempted fate in this manner she had been the accredited fount of artistic authority at Wentworth: she could shake her head over Sargent's slapdash methods and say that of course he was marvellously clever, but she personally most admired a more detailed and highly finished technique: careful work was what lived. No doubt if she had the heart to continue putting her sketches on the chimney piece of the lounge, Wentworth would say that they were exquisite, but at the back of everybody's mind would be the knowledge that a roomful of such gems had been on view and had attracted but few visitors and not a single purchaser even at prices immeasurably below Sargent's. She had piped but nobody had danced: the Muse felt her insignia slipping from her.

These gloomy reflections so occupied her that she had not seen that she was catching up a woman walking ahead of her up the hill, and it was not till she had got quite close that she saw it was Mrs. Bliss, limping slightly and leaning on her stick, but able to proceed at a very respectable pace. In the ten days that she had been at Bolton she had indeed made the most marvellous progress. "But however much she calls it 'Mind,'" thought Miss Howard in a spasm of revolt, "I call it 'brine.'"

Mrs. Bliss turned round when she was quite close. It

struck Miss Howard that the smile was whisked on when she saw who it was.

"Sweet one!" said Mrs. Bliss. "How fortunate I am to have such a dear companion for the rest of my walk, I'll be bound that your lovely picture show was crowded with visitors this morning, and probably most of them sold. How I demonstrated about this in my bath this morning! How Mind looks after us all! See how I'm flitting along to-day."

That certainly was wonderful, though "flit" was still slightly on the optimistic side of accuracy. And it wasn't Mind: it was brine.

"No, there wasn't any crowd at all," said the "sweet one" firmly. "In fact there was no one there at all. And I haven't sold a single picture yet."

A wave of bitter illumination swept over her, calling for her protest.

"In fact, I don't think much of Mind," she added.

Mrs. Bliss remained quite unshocked by this blasphemy. That was one of the truly annoying things about her, thought Miss Howard: you couldn't stop her smiling any more than you could stop an express train by defying it, nor could you cool her exasperating certainty that everything was perfect, and that everybody was a skipping lamb in green pastures. She laughed merrily.

"You darling rebel!" she said. "What joy it will be when your dear blind eyes are opened!"

"I intend to keep them shut," said Miss Howard in the vain attempt to shake this fearful confidence. "I've got to face the fact that nobody wants to see my pictures

or to buy them. So it's no use saying that Mind is looking after my exhibition. I give up Mind."

Even this did not dim Mrs. Bliss's radiance.

"Dear thing!" she said. "But Mind won't give you up. Think of all the wonderful things Mind has done for us quite lately at our pretty Wentworth. Colonel Chase's cold, his pedometer, his success at the entertainment. All Mind. Look at me, too, in spite of the baths and the massage."

"And look at Mr. Kemp," said Miss Howard. "He's no better. If anything, he's worse."

Mrs. Bliss laughed again.

"But, dear, he's well," she said. "He doesn't know it yet, but he is. It often happens that Error still blinds people even when they are cured, and they still think they are suffering. But soon that passes. You're just the same about your pictures. Only wait a little: abide patiently."

It was a relief to Miss Howard when they got to Wentworth and Mrs. Bliss went to lie down on her bed, not to rest but to work, for she found such optimism harder to bear than her own pessimism. She felt that after this solitary morning in the Green Salon a similar afternoon would be intolerable, and determined not to go down again that day. It would be time enough tomorrow morning to learn that not a sixpence had been recorded on the toilet roll, or a red star appeared on the walls. She occupied herself till lunch time with the sketch of the lounge.

Now while she was trying to make the staircase appear scalable, two very important scenes took place in

the hollow where the town lay. The first of these began with Mrs. Holders and Tim coming simultaneously out of the ladies' and gentlemen's sections of the Establishment after their baths and meeting in front of the Green Salon. The door was open and the custodian had gone to eat his dinner and have a little exercise with his friends. They looked in.

"My word, what rubbish, isn't it, Tim?" she said. "She can't paint. I think I shall give a vocal recital, or act Ophelia."

"Do: may I be Hamlet?" said he. "Look at Bethesda falling down, and Healing Springs. I wish they would heal me. And not a picture sold yet, or they would have labels."

"And God's Acre: it's not nearly an acre," said Mrs. Holders. "What a fool the woman is to think they could sell. But rather pathetic: all that trouble, not to mention the frames. I hate middle-aged spinsters being disappointed, because they've nothing to look forward to. Tim, I think we shall be obliged to buy some."

"I'm damned if I do," said Tim.

"You'll be damned if you don't, dear, because you'll have been a brute. And I said 'some.' It's no use our buying just one each. We're both rich, thank God. And she hasn't warbled all to-day and all yesterday. Not a note——"

"Well, don't set her off again," said Tim.

"And the improvisation wasn't a success. And she's feeling terribly down. Now be a man!"

The custodian at this moment returned from dinner and leapfrog, and seeing somebody in the Green Salon rushed gleefully in and pulled out the toilet roll.

"Sixpence each, please, sir," he said.

"How many people have been in to-day?" asked Tim.

"Only one and he didn't pay. Said he was the press. Sixpence——"

"And yesterday?" asked Mrs. Holders.

"We didn't have any visitors yesterday, ma'am. Catalogue free, and there's a price catalogue, too."

They hobbled round together with it.

"What's that squirrel?" asked Tim.

"Pussy-dear," said she. "One guinea. Oh, it's the Wentworth cat. Mrs. Oxney ought to buy that, of course. Tim, I think you and I must have five each. That'll make a start. Half-guinea ones will do. No, we can't do that quite."

"I'm glad," said he.

"I don't mean what you mean. What I mean is that if you and I each buy five, there'll be a sort of indelicacy about it. Compassion, you know, which is always objectionable. We must think of another plan. I know. Bring me a chair, you boy, or I shall fall down."

"Two," said Tim.

"Now attend, Tim," she said, "for I'm being very bright. This morning, just now, in fact, quite a lot of people came in to the show. You and I, that's two, and four more."

"Then they had to pay for admission," said Tim.

"I'm glad you thought of that: of course they had. Four more tickets, boy. You pay, Tim, I haven't got a sou."

"You're running me into a great deal of expense," said Tim.

"I'm going to run you into more. Give this gentleman four more tickets, boy, and he gives you two shillings. That's right, isn't it? Now go away till we call you again."

Mrs. Holders sat silent a moment, arranging the conspiracy.

"What has happened, Tim, is this," she said at length. "These four people whose tickets you have just so kindly paid for each bought two of Miss Howard's pictures. You must think of two friends of yours, and I'll think of two friends of mine, and we'll give their names and addresses and money to the boy, and write to them to say that they will shortly receive two sad little water colours each. They'll get them, of course, when the exhibition closes. You can tell your friends to send the pictures back to you, of course, if you like. That will be eight pictures, and you and I will each buy one on our account, and that makes ten. Now you've got to think of the names and addresses of two friends: after that all you have to do is to pay and look just as unpleasant as you choose. I don't mind. I'll give you a check for my share."

"Good old thing," said Tim. "Now we'll get the boy and din it into his head."

Leapfrog showed himself very intelligent, and after two minutes' coaching he repeated without flaw all these

remarkable occurrences. Mrs. Holders and Mr. Bullingdon (address Wentworth), he told them, had come in and paid their sixpences, and each had bought a picture (numbers 2 and 11). They hadn't been gone more than a minute when two ladies came in, and after paying for admittance (toilet roll as before) called for the price catalogue. They each bought two pictures (numbers 7, 13, 24 and 31), which they paid for, and gave their names and addresses, which he duly entered. Just before (or after) they left, two gentlemen came in, paid their sixpences and went round. They too called for the price list—seeming to admire the pictures very much—and bought two each (numbers 20, 35, 39 and 40). They paid their money, and gave names and addresses. . . . The custodian then went to the bar to get change, and put into his breast pocket five pound-notes and five shillings. A half crown, the reward of intelligence, he put into the pocket where was the pill box. The conspirators waited to see him lick ten adhesive red stars and fix them to the corners of pictures 2, 7, 11, 13, 20, 24, 31, 35, 39 and 40. There seemed no possible risk of detection. Then they found they had missed the Wentworth bus and took a taxi, arriving late for lunch and rather cross with each other.

The other important event was concerned with the spiritual life of Colonel Chase, and was therefore of deeper significance than these mere financial benefits to Miss Howard. He had started that morning meaning to pay a visit to her exhibition at the cost of sixpence, though of course he would not dream of buying one of

her faint little daubs. But her pleasure and gratification at his visit would efface from her mind that impression of paltry fibbing which might possibly be lurking there owing to Mrs. Oxney's silly chatter about his mackintosh. Having thus reëstablished the candour of his character, he would go for a fine ride to make up for having missed one yesterday. But as he went quietly down the hill (it was not worth while getting up speed, if he was to dismount so soon) the thought of Miss Howard's exhibition began to arouse acute annoyance in his mind: it was a barefaced levying of blackmail on her friends, they could not in decency refuse to put at least sixpence into Miss Howard's pocket. The thought of this moral compulsion revolted him and he determined to strike a blow for English freedom, and not go at all. He therefore put on speed and was seen by the custodian pedalling, as if for a wager, past the baths, feeling that he was a champion of liberty. He did not mind giving Miss Howard sixpence but he refused to be obliged to . . .

The roads had dried up wonderfully after the deluge of yesterday, he drew in a long breath of the cool fresh air, and his great fat legs revolved as if nothing could ever tire them. It was impossible (and so he did not attempt it) not to reflect with strong satisfaction on his own health and vigour and heartiness. His Indian contemporaries were mostly wizened and yellow little men suffering from liver, or obese waddlers who sat all day in armchairs, and perhaps occasionally played a couple of rounds of golf, six or seven miles all told, and were very tired after it, whereas here was he active in mind

and body, ready to cover mile after mile on foot or saddle without fatigue, and be fit afterwards for strong brain work over reading or cross-word puzzles or bridge.

These gratifying thoughts put him in a better temper, and forgiving Miss Howard for her exhibition, he registered the fact that he had never felt so well as he had done during the last fortnight. His superb vitality had thrown off in a single night the most undoubted symptoms of a crashing cold . . . and his mind shifted to Mrs. Bliss and that extraordinary gospel of hers. Was it perhaps she who had called down on him this amazing access of health and prosperity? There was his cold, there was his pedometer, there was his huge success (though not quite in the manner he had anticipated) at the entertainment, and as for that small distressing incident in the Children's Hospital, she had assured him, though in terms he did not attempt to fathom, that Mind was acting just as beneficently there as in its more obvious manifestations. He had never completely determined whether he seriously ascribed all these benefits to her agency: his cold might possibly have disappeared through natural causes, but the reappearance of the pedometer fairly puzzled him. She had no account to give of it: it had just come to her, like manna, miraculously. But to her it was not miraculous at all: it was a perfectly normal result of relying on Omnipotent Mind, and being full of loving and trusting thoughts. After all he was a thoroughly good-natured fellow: people had only to make themselves pleasant to him, and give him his way

on every occasion, and he was as jolly as possible with them. He must keep that up, and with the hope of obtaining further benefits from Mind, he resolved to go to Miss Howard's exhibition. Mind would like that: it would be a good-natured act toward poor Miss Howard who had not got an encore at the entertainment nor roused the smallest enthusiasm, and who had not sold a picture. To be sure the whole thing was blackmail but he felt that, in view of Mind, he was big enough to overlook that, and give pleasure to Miss Howard. Her little place in Kent too: he wondered . . .

Though a swift bicyclist, Colonel Chase was not a rapid thinker, and by the time he had arrived at this conclusion, he saw that he had been riding for over an hour. Absorbed in these spiritual problems, he had been paying little attention to the swift passage of the landscape, and now, looking about him again, he saw that the country was wholly new to him. He had certainly started by the Denton road, and had followed its familiar windings, but here he was at the end of an hour quite beyond his usual beat. Never had an hour or a bicycle sped so swiftly: he could not believe that so much time had passed, or so much ground been covered. Behind him lay a long stretch of upward incline which had flowed under his wheel as if it had been level, and he was neither out of breath nor conscious of any fatigue: he had climbed as if on eagle's wings. "It must be Mind," he said to himself, "it can't possibly be anything else. I shall go to poor Miss Howard's show this very afternoon, and I'm not sure that I sha'n't buy one of her

well-meaning little sketches. I was wrong to think of her as a blackmailer. All is health, kindliness, and prosperity."

A signpost confirmed his immense distance from home, making him exult in the splendour of his prowess, and after a round which he had not previously believed was traversible by a leg-driven wheel, he found himself back in Bolton again. There had been a slight abrasion on his ankle yesterday, and not wanting to bother Mind over so small a matter, he stopped at Mr. Amble's to purchase a phial of New Skin. You painted it on the place and it smarted, but, relying on Mind, very likely he would not feel it. Mr. Amble was delighted to see him in his shop again, for this visit was a token of reconciliation after those choleric speeches on the telephone and he entirely forgot the existence of the "little secret" between him and that odd though affable lady . . .

"New Skin, sir?" he said. "Yes, I can supply you with that. And I was very pleased, Colonel, to have been the means of restoring your pedometer to you. My lad picked it up——"

"Eh, what's that?" said Colonel Chase.

"Your pedometer, Colonel, which you lost last week. My lad picked it up on the Denton road; let me see it would be ten days ago now, and I gave it a clean and sent it—— Good Lord, why I quite forgot that the lady I gave it to asked me not to mention it. But there's no harm done, I hope, and anyhow she's not been in here

since, nor bought anything then. She saw the notice in my window that a pedometer had been found, and since she looked respectable and since she came from Wentworth, I let her take it to return to you. I hope there's been no—no mistake and that she did give it you."

Mind's greatest miracle of all had collapsed, as if a flood of corrosive light from some devilish higher criticism had been poured on it. Colonel Chase's faith in Mind trembled, tottered, and crashed: it was an infidel who stood there holding a bottle of New Skin in his shaking hand.

What liars women were! To think that this abandoned wretch distinctly said that she had no notion how she got the pedometer: she said that she was lost in meditation, and, lo, it was in her hand. He felt positively sick.

"No, there was no mistake," he said—the irony of that!—"she gave it me."

He went out of the shop and pedalled up the hill with a mind reeling with atheism. If this was the true history (and it certainly was) of the most inexplicable of all Mind's miracles, it was not any longer possible to credit Mind with his restoration from his cold or with his success at the entertainment. And if Mind had not showered these benefits upon him, why propitiate it by going to Miss Howard's Green Salon, let alone buying anything therein? Even the joy of having certainly beaten all records this morning almost faded, when he dismounted at Wentworth, and when he looked at his pedometer it was completely extinguished, for once

more the pedometer had stopped. The hands sarcastically affirmed that he had gone six miles.

Lunch had begun and he entered the dining room in the manner of Hyperia, "full of wrath." He stopped opposite Mrs. Bliss's table, who, unconscious of what was coming, smiled gaily up at him.

"What a lovely morning you've had for your ride, Colonel!" she said. "I expect you've been ever so far away over the blue, blue hills."

He raised his voice. It was right that what he had to say to her should be known to all.

"I have to thank you, Mrs. Bliss," he said, "for restoring to me the pedometer I lost, which Amble the chemist gave you. He tells me that his shop boy found it."

She did not sink into the earth or behave like Sapphira. She laughed delightedly and clapped her hands.

"That was it!" she said. "I could not recollect how I got it. I only knew I had to give it back to you. But it's come back to me now."

Dead silence had fallen on the luncheon, and had it not been for Colonel Chase's heavy tread as, leaving her without a word, he went to his place, anyone might have heard a pin drop. Then hurried conversation broke out, and Miss Howard so far forgot her malicious design of guessing that he had gone eighty miles as to say to him: "And how far have you been this morning, Colonel?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," he said. "Once more the pedometer on my bicycle—pedometer," he re-

peated—"got out of order and stopped. Odd things happen to my pedometer."

This withering remark had no effect whatever on Mrs. Bliss. She finished her fish and sat gazing out of the window in happy reverie till the parlour maid brought her the next dish.

CHAPTER VII

MR. BANKS in his sermon the preceding Sunday morning had made a very profound observation. It must not be supposed from this statement that profound observations coming from his pulpit were of rare occurrence: they were on the contrary so common that they often passed unnoticed or at any rate not fully appreciated. For instance, when in this same sermon he said, "If, dear friends, we all invariably acted on our nobler rather than our baser impulses, the world would be a very different place," there was scarcely anyone in his congregation who grasped the whole of the tremendous truth that lurked in these simple words. Shortly afterwards he uttered another truth, which likewise attracted no particular attention at the time, but was soon seen to be not only profound but, as regards the affairs of Miss Howard, prophetical.

"People," said this subtle observer, "are like sheep. If one leads, in things great or small, the rest will follow. Let each of us therefore lead in all high thought and selfless deeds, and we shall speedily find that we are not alone as we tread the upward path of Christian endeavour. And now——"

Mrs. Banks had been much struck by this analogy

between people and sheep: it seemed to her "very teaching," and at lunch afterwards she thanked her husband for the enlightenment it had brought her. She was of a quaintly humorous disposition, and she knew that a playful application of his words would not displease him, for he often said that what we learn in church we should use in daily life.

"It is true in all sorts of ways, Hildebrand," she said. "For instance, at the entertainment the other night it only needed that one rude boy should laugh at Colonel Chase's ghost story to set the whole room off. I wonder if it was meant to be funny or meant to thrill us?"

"Oh, meant to thrill without a doubt," said Hildebrand, "but it just turned out different from what he expected. Like puddings. I only hope Miss Howard's exhibition will turn out different from what I expect, for if it doesn't she won't sell a single picture. But we must both go to it."

"Of course. Poor Miss Howard. But perhaps somebody will buy one and other people follow as you said."

This duty of going to the Green Salon had escaped their memories (or was inconvenient to fulfil) for the first three days that it was open, and thus, when on Wednesday Mrs. Holders and Tim made their amiable conspiracy, neither the vicar nor his wife had seen the numerous pictures of his church. But on Thursday morning it so happened that she had to go to the post office, and he to visit a sick parishioner. Their ways lay in the same direction and they set off together; the sight

of the baths put the forgotten duty into Mrs. Banks's head.

"Let us pop in for a moment and see poor Miss Howard's pictures," said she. "She may not be there yet, which would be a good thing, for if she comes round with us and looks sad we shall find it difficult not to buy one."

Miss Howard was there, going through some list with the custodian. But so far from looking sad her face expressed high elation, and she came tripping toward them with the greatest cheerfulness.

"How-de-do, Mrs. Banks," she said. "So good of you and the padre to look in. Very little worth seeing, I'm afraid——"

"Ah, you mustn't think this is our first visit," said Mrs. Banks, who had a perfect genius, "for just not telling lies." "And as for there being very little worth seeing, well, I can't agree. Oh, look, Hildebrand. There's the lovely, lovely picture of St. Giles's. Why, it has a little red star on it. Does that mean it is sold, Miss Howard? What a disappointment!"

"Yes, I'm afraid that's gone," said Miss Howard. "But you'll find one somewhere, from nearly the same point of view, but in the evening. There it is! Ah, that's sold, too. I can't keep pace with them."

Somehow this put a very different aspect on poor Miss Howard and her exhibition, and when she went back to the task of verifying the purchased pictures with the custodian, looking the very reverse of sad, and not showing the slightest inclination to go round with them,

the two, who had not been near the Green Salon before, began at the very beginning in an attentive and respectful scrutiny. The padre's sermon was assuming the prophetical aspect.

"What a lot she's sold," said Mrs. Banks in discreet tones. "And really they are very charming. Look at Number 7, Hildebrand: The curfew tolls the knell of parting day, with the spire of St. Giles's among the trees. Sweet! But I see that's sold."

"I think I like Number 6 even better," said Mr. Banks. " 'Number 6: God's Acre.' Very feeling. Tombstones. Really I should immensely like to possess that. A truly religious touch about it. 'God's Acre,' too; a beautiful description."

While he stood there with his head on one side, quite lost in admiration, the custodian, who had finished his agreeable task with Miss Howard, sidled up to his wife.

"There is a price list, madam," he softly insinuated.

"Yes, let me look," she whispered, and found it was only ten-and-sixpence.

"I'll take it," she said. "Mrs. Banks, the Vicarage. Put a star on it at once, and get me change."

Miss Howard, seeing that business was going on, delicately left the Green Salon, and Mrs. Banks joined her husband, who was still basking on God's Acre.

"Hildebrand, dear, God's Acre is yours. My Christmas present to you. I had been wondering what to give you."

He gave a start of pleasure and surprise.

"My dear," said he, "what a delicious present. I can't tell you what joy——"

"But you must forget all about it again," she said, "till I give it you on Christmas morning."

After that it was only fair that Mrs. Banks should have her turn to be lost in admiration of another picture, and the one she happened to select for that purpose was Evening Bells. When it was quite clear that she liked this more than any, Hildebrand wandered quietly away to the custodian, who was busy at the moment detaching a slip of toilet paper for Colonel Chase, and asked for the price list. Two guineas was rather a staggerer, and it was distinctly bad luck that his wife had so firmly set her affections on Evening Bells, when almost anything else might have been had for a quarter of that sum, but he could not be blind to her clear choice. He produced two pound-notes, and a shilling and two sixpences.

"The Vicar," he said rather sadly. "Put a label on Number 27 as sold."

"Hurroi!" said the custodian, and went out to find Miss Howard and tell her of this huge accession to the treasury.

Colonel Chase was in a rather lofty mood that morning. Kind but lofty.

"Well, Padre," he said. "We meet on a charitable errand. Wouldn't do to have nobody coming to our friend's little effort. What? You've been buying one, have you? Well, I call that kind. I'll be bound it's the

first that's been sold, and I shouldn't wonder if it was the last. I suppose I must get a catalogue. What is there, nothing but that typewritten thing? Nothing printed? Oh, they don't charge for it. I dare say it will do very well."

He began reading the catalogue, glancing hastily at the pictures to verify the titles.

"Golf Links, Wentworth," he said. "Yes, that's right, and a lot of trouble I spent over them, too. But that tree has gone now: quite changed the look of the place, as well as spoiling one of the best holes. Number 5 now, Bethesda. Ah, yes, I see: a cat. I suppose Bethesda is the name of the cat. No, no: my mistake, Number 5 is Pussy-dear. That's Mrs. Oxney's cat: I hear enough of it at night without wanting to see a picture of it, and 'Pussy-dear' doesn't quite interpret my feelings about it. Still, the picture has a sort of look of the animal. Good-morning, Mrs. Padre; how's the violin? It was a pretty piece you played us the other night. Fully deserved an encore, I thought."

"No time for the violin to-day, Colonel Chase," she said. "Every minute that I can spare this morning I shall give to these pictures. Impossible to tear oneself away. And just think, my husband has given me Evening Bells, the loveliest of all, as a Christmas present. Is it not too dear of him?"

"Very kind, I'm sure," said Colonel Chase. "Now let's see: Number 6: God's Acre. What are those white things? Ah, tombstones: yes, God's Acre. That's got a little star on it, I see, which I suppose means it's

sold. And Number 7 is sold too, and 13. Why, there seems to be a regular run on Miss Howard's pictures. I am surprised."

"I'm sure I'm not," said Mrs. Banks, who being the owner of one picture and the purchaser of another was bound to spur everyone else on to buy one. "Such feeling! Such beautiful technique. And the critics think the world of them. There was an article in the Bolton *Gazette* and the writer couldn't have said more of them if they had been by Mr. Sargent. I think I am indeed fortunate to have Evening Bells before anybody else snapped it up."

All this was beginning to work a subtle change in Colonel Chase: he was looking at these little efforts with quite a different eye. He had come in Balaam's first mood, inclined to curse the expenditure of sixpence as the payment of blackmail, but this public eagerness to secure an example of Miss Howard's skill made him wonder whether he should not be blessing a blackmail which seemed to offer an opportunity of securing something worth having at a most reasonable outlay. He had hazarded the cynical conjecture that Miss Howard had written that laudatory notice herself, but, however that might be, purchasers were ripe, for he saw, looking inquiringly round, that a dozen of the little efforts had already been snapped up and were twinkling with little red stars. The price catalogue, into which, at this moment, the custodian, that fine psychological observer, suggested he might like to glance, told him that almost any of the remaining pearls could be acquired for half

a guinea and what if they turned out to be of the true Orient, destined to be eagerly sought for by the *cognoscenti.* A bargain always appealed to him if it did not entail much outlay, and the fact that Florence, who had just come in, was looking fixedly at Golf Links, Wentworth, made him hate the notion that anyone but he should possess a work which in addition to its artistic merit should surely be owned by the creator of the golf links. "A pretty sketch," he could imagine himself saying, "I laid the links out myself." He hurriedly produced a ten-shilling note and six coppers and entered his name on the lengthening list as its purchaser. Out came the pill box and the custodian's tongue, and he shot forward with a red star on the tip of it, and in his eagerness affixed it to the centre of the glass.

"Snapped up, I'm afraid, Miss Kemp," said Colonel Chase jovially. "One has to make up one's mind quickly if one wants one of Miss Howard's sketches. I couldn't let anyone else have that picture of my golf links with the dear old tree still standing by the centre green. Very beautiful effect, is it not?"

Colonel Chase had now enrolled himself in the ranks of those who, having bought pictures, were all agog that others should buy as well, thus indorsing their own wisdom and artistic taste, and presently he and the padre and Mrs. Banks were all strongly advising Florence to secure "Oh, to be in England now that April's there," before it was too late. She had only just put it out of the reach of other aspirants when there arose a perfect hubbub at the door, and the custodian's voice was

heard respectfully but shrilly demanding an entrance fee.

"No, my lady," he said, "the exhibition isn't free to anybody. Admission sixpence each," and there was Lady Appledore and Miss Jobson, the former in a state of dignified resentment.

"Pay it then, Miss Jobson," she said, "though after all I've done for the town I should have thought my admittance was a matter of course. Let me see: Colonel Chase, is it not, who told us those amusing ghost stories. And Mr. Banks. And Mrs. Banks: the violin. Quite a crowd. I cannot understand why I have received no notices of Miss Howard's exhibition before, as it is well known that I make a point of encouraging local industries. An odd omission. It was quite by accident that I saw a small placard outside the baths as I was driving by. 'Miss Jobson,' I said, 'kindly go and see what that placard is.' "

They all three assailed her with laudatory remarks.

"A lucky accident indeed," said Mrs. Banks. "You will be charmed with Miss Howard's work."

"We all are, Lady Appledore," said Colonel Chase. "The art critic in the Bolton *Gazette* was most enthusiastic."

"My wife has given me God's Acre for a Christmas present, Lady Appledore," said Mr. Banks.

"And I have got 'Oh to be in England now that April's here,' " said Florence, who, not having been introduced, stated the fact to nobody in particular.

"And my husband has given me Evening Bells, which

I think you will agree is the gem of them all, Lady Appledore," said Mrs. Banks.

"A catalogue," said Lady Bolton, putting out her hand. Four catalogues were thrust into it.

"I will look round and judge for myself," said Lady Appledore. "Dear me, do all those red stars on the pictures mean that they are sold?"

"Yes," said everybody.

"I am sorry not to have heard about this earlier," said she, "for I have always been a great judge of water colours. Miss Howard must have made quite a fortune. It was Miss Howard, I believe, who played us little pieces of Chopin the other night, but I do not know her, do I, Miss Jobson? I hope I shall like her pictures better than her playing. Number 6 is pretty: a good middle distance. What is Number 6 called, Miss Jobson? Oh, God's Acre, I see, to be sure. But it is bought."

"Yes, am I not fortunate? That is mine," said Mr. Banks.

"You have not chosen badly. Full of feeling. Number 9, Miss Jobson."

" 'The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,' " said Miss Jobson.

"That is not bad either. It is evening, Miss Jobson. Curfew is invariably in the evening. About eight o'clock. That is not sold, I see. Put a mark against it till I have seen the rest. Somebody will lend you a pencil if you have not got one."

The majestic procession moved slowly on.

"A cat," said Lady Appledore. "I do not like cats.

Miss Howard should not have painted a cat. Mist in the Valley represents Bolton Spa, Miss Jobson, but you cannot see it because of the mist. Put a smaller mark opposite Mist in the Valley. Mist on the Hills is Bolton Spa also, but now you can see Bolton Spa because there is no mist in the valley. Put nothing opposite Mist on the Hills. Geraniums: that is better. They are red: I should say that they are decidedly geraniums. Let somebody give me the catalogue of prices. . . . 'Geraniums, one guinea': that is a great deal of money. Still Life: I should call it Still Death, because there is no animation about it."

Mr. Banks, who was holding the price catalogue in front of Lady Appledore like the Gospels, gave a sycophantic laugh.

"Excellent!" he said. "How you hit it off, Lady Appledore. 'Still Death.' I must remember that. Did you hear that, Colonel? My lady says that Still Life should be called Still Death. I did not care for the picture myself, and now I know the reason. No animation: an admirable criticism."

"Very true; very true indeed," said Colonel Chase. "I hope you like the little picture I have bought, Lady Appledore. Golf Links, Wentworth. I took a lot of trouble in laying them out."

Lady Appledore kindly retraced her steps to Number 6.

"A matter of taste," she said. "It does not appeal to mine. If I were you I should instantly purchase Geraniums, Colonel Chase. Geraniums is well worth a guinea.

I should not let Geraniums slip through my fingers. But I would not buy Still Life. You may trust my judgment, Colonel Chase, and have nothing to do with Still Life, but buy Geraniums before it is snapped up. You will never regret it."

She fixed him with an implacable eye which was not removed till he had told the custodian to put the fatal red star on the corner of Geraniums.

"Make a rule, Colonel Chase," she said, "always to buy the best work, and then you will know—well, that you have the best. Geraniums and the Curfew are undoubtedly Miss Howard's masterpieces." (This was agonizing for Mr. Banks, who might have bought both masterpieces for less than he had paid for Evening Bells.) "Of the two I prefer the Curfew, which I shall now purchase. Miss Jobson, see to a star on Curfew, and say the remittance will follow."

Miss Howard meantime had been hovering about outside the Green Salon, torn between the desire not to appear supplicant for purchasers and the longing to make Lady Appledore's acquaintance, for she had not been introduced to her on the evening of the entertainment. Her curiosity also to see how many more pictures had been bought (for the custodian had been flitting about all this time with the price catalogue) was becoming unbearable. So she tripped in quite unconscious of Lady Appledore's presence, and of the unusual number of visitors in the Green Salon, and felt the temperature of the hot-water pipes. She withdrew her fingers with a

little exclamation of dismay at their intense fervour and turned off the tap.

"I can't have you all roasted, Mr. Banks," she said. "That would be too bad after your kindness in coming to see my little pictures."

That was sufficient indication of her identity, and Lady Appledore held out her hand.

"I am pleased to have seen your pictures, Miss Howard," she said. "That is not an empty compliment, for I have bought your Curfew. A very creditable effort. Nice tone. Should you ever be in the neighbourhood of the Grange, you will find some fine subjects in the Park. You may tell them at any of the lodges that I have given you leave to paint in the Park. Miss Jobson, kindly tell the motor that I am ready."

Miss Jobson hurried out to inform the intelligent machine, which thereupon ousted the bus from Wentworth that was standing at the entrance, forcing it to drive out of "Out," and come in again behind at "In." Miss Howard saw Lady Appledore off, leaving Colonel Chase trying to revoke his purchase of Golf Links on the grounds of having chosen Geraniums instead. The custodian was contesting the point with great firmness.

It was now so near lunch time that Mr. Banks, who was engaged to take this meal at the Warwickshire Hotel with a button king from Manchester, decided to postpone his visit to the sick parishioner till afternoon. As was natural, he told his host about the honour Lady Appledore had done to the exquisite exhibition in the Green Salon, and about her purchase of one of Miss

Howard's finest examples. The best of the pictures (as well as far the most expensive, he was afraid) had already been secured, but there were some very charming pieces left.

"The art critics are wild about them," he said, "it is a great opportunity for any collector."

The button king had most artistic tastes, and owned a gallery of pictures.

" 'Oward?" he said. "Never 'eard of 'Oward. Have we got a 'Oward, missus? Don't think we've got a 'Oward. Better 'ave a look at them after lunch before my bath. Glass of champagne for you, Mr. Banks. Wish I could drink champagne, but it's poison to me. And the Countess of Appledore bought one, did she? Pleased to know about them."

This promised well but ended in a fiasco. The button king hobbled into the Green Salon before his bath but was vexed at being charged only sixpence for admission: this was paltry. Paltrier yet was the price catalogue, for nothing for which you were charged only half a guinea could possibly be worth purchase. He had hoped that the lowest price would be fifty guineas or a hundred: that might have been worth considering. But who wanted a ten-and-sixpenny picture? Paltry, he called it, and went to be pickled instead. Missus, however, took a different view: she thought them sweetly pretty, and bought two for her boudoir.

Colonel Chase mounted his bicycle when he came out, having been unable to induce the custodian to refund a penny, and went off for his ride. He did not in-

tend to return to Wentworth for lunch and had taken with him what he called "a snack," which caused the pockets of his Norfolk jacket to bulge with light refreshment. In one there were some rolls stuffed with ham, and a large lump of cheese, in another a couple of hard-boiled eggs, an apple, and a stick of chocolate; in a third a flask of whisky, a cold sausage, and a small thermos flask containing coffee. His regard for Miss Howard had soared since breakfast, and his contemptuous compassion for her unpatronized wares and unpurchased walls had given place to a strong feeling of respect for one whose work was so eminently marketable and had won the admiration of a dowager countess. She could go warbling out in the morning with a paint box and a bit of paper, just for her own amusement, and bring back the foundations of half a guinea. That was a gift, a solid asset, and as he selected a convenient felled tree trunk by the wayside on which he could sit and spread out his little snack, where the sun was warm on his back, and his folded mackintosh kept him safe from damp, he began to consider, as he was periodically wont to do, whether on the whole he would be more comfortable if he was married, and whether he was likely to find anyone more suitable than Miss Howard to make him so. She was not young, she was not, though neat and presentable, pretty any longer, but that was all to the good, for the excited hysterical element which entered, he believed, into alliance between boys and girls must have no place in this union. Wentworth, with a few weeks of lodgings in London and meals at his

club, was a very easy sort of existence, but the worry and trouble of a house and household would, of course, if he married, be borne by his wife, his part in it would only be to mention it if the bath water was not hot, or the food not to his liking, much as he did now. She, in fact, would be a sort of Mrs. Oxney though honoured with his name. Then there was the question of expense, but since Miss Howard could afford to live at Wentworth and go off once or twice a year to Torquay, it looked as if she ought to be able to bear half the charge of a small household. Besides, she had her little place in Kent, near Tunbridge Wells: when the lease of her present tenants came to an end, they could live there, rent free. He figured it, on the impression he had got from her allusions to it, as a pleasant manorial house of stone or old brick, with a stable and a garden and "grounds," too small perhaps to call a park, but with room, no doubt, for a miniature golf links, and an air of landed dignity. There was sure to be a club at Tunbridge Wells frequented by business men who went up to the City by early trains, and by local gentry, and he could drop into the club for a cup of tea and a rubber of bridge before getting back to his little place and Mrs. Colonel, who would scold him if he was late. The days would pass very pleasantly: he would bicycle as usual all the morning, and she, after seeing to her household duties, would turn sheets of drawing paper into half guineas: he would potter about his garden or golf links in the afternoon, and perhaps he would have a small car. "Squire Chase," he thought to himself.

The snack had almost completely disappeared during these reflections and Colonel Chase, nourished now and well warmed by the sun, felt very benevolent toward the whole world. There was just one egg still uneaten, and this he peeled and chipped into small pieces with his pocketknife, generously strewing them on the trunk of the tree where he sat, so that the birds might eat and be filled and bless him in their pretty twitterings. He mounted his bicycle again and wondered how he could find out more concerning Miss Howard's little place in Kent. She let it, as she had said, because she could not afford to live in it, but with Squire Chase to share expenses, which he would be quite willing to do if the little place was a nice little place, it might be manageable. The more he thought about Miss Howard in connection with her little place, the brighter grew Miss Howard's prospects in connection with him. This marriage would be a sensible contract for mutual advantage: she would get a husband who would look after her place for her, and he a wife who would look after his comfort.

Unconscious of these plans for her advantage, Miss Howard meantime had flown rather than walked up to Wentworth for lunch with all this wonderful news to give of the Green Salon, and positively eager to recant her blasphemy against Mind. Yesterday at this time when no pictures had been sold and not a visitor demanded toilet paper, she had firmly announced that she gave up Mind, and that fell determination had been confirmed by the subsequent revelation that Colonel

Chase's pedometer had not been miraculously wafted into Mrs. Bliss's hand by Mind's mysterious agency but had been placed there, in answer to her simple request, by an ordinary chemist. But now she thought no more about pedometers: a cataract of purchasers had descended on the Green Salon and she unhesitatingly accepted the benevolent powers which had guided them there and opened their hearts and their purses as identical with that which had removed the colonel's cold in a single night. And there was Mrs. Bliss in the lounge, smiling and joyful, though as yet she knew nothing of what had occurred.

"Dear one!" she said. "And how have things gone today? Have you less of that despondency which keeps you in Error, and of the Error which keeps you in despondency? . . . Sweet one, how lovely! I see it has gone from you. You have been denying it, and Mind has shown you its nothingness. Evil is nothing, nothing is evil. Love, Mind, Omnipotence deny hate, Error—— Tell me all about it. I could jump for joy."

Miss Howard could have jumped too.

"Oh, Mrs. Bliss, it's too wonderful!" she said. "It has turned out just as you said it would. I went down to the Green Salon this morning, still in Error, and expecting to find that nobody had been in, or bought anything, and instead there was the most wonderful news! Kind dear Mr. Bullingdon, whom I had thought rather unappreciative of my pictures, and oh, how wrong I was —I suppose that was Error too—and dear kind Mrs. Holders, who, I thought, didn't care about them either,

each bought a picture yesterday morning, and they had hardly gone when two ladies came in, and, would you believe it? each of them bought two pictures, which made six——"

She broke off a moment as Mrs. Holders hobbled downstairs from her rest.

"Oh, Mrs. Holders," she said, "how good it was of you and Mr. Bullingdon to buy those pictures yesterday! That started everything: I mean Mind began then. I was just telling Mrs. Bliss. Do you know that you and Mr. Bullingdon had hardly gone when two ladies came in, and each of them bought two more. I can't think who they can have been, for their names were quite unknown to me. I suppose they came from one of the hotels; they were just two ladies, the boy at the door told me, and he couldn't describe them at all. And then they had hardly gone when two gentlemen came in and they each bought one, and I didn't know their names either, and that made ten pictures all in one morning. Wasn't it wonderful, just when I was beginning to feel so dreadfully low about it, and to wish that I had never thought of having an exhibition at all!"

Mrs. Holders looked very much surprised: up went the eyebrows.

"That looks like Mind, doesn't it?" she said, in a rather cold, sarcastic tone, and she hobbled off without another word in the direction of the dining room.

Miss Howard thought it very kind of her to have bought a picture, but her manner was far from sympathetic. She turned to ecstatic Mrs. Bliss again.

"And that wasn't all, not nearly," she resumed, "for soon after I went down this morning, and was hearing about all this, in came the dear padre and Mrs. Banks, and not their first visit either, and though I made myself busy with checking the names and that sort of thing, so as not to look as if I wanted them to buy anything——"

"Quite right, dear one," said Mrs. Bliss. "We have to trust to Mind completely, when we have done our best, and make no interference. Yes?"

"They asked for the catalogue of prices," said Miss Howard, who had held her mouth open during this interruption, so as to go on again at once, "and first she bought God's Acre, and then he bought Evening Bells which was the highest priced of all. And they had hardly bought theirs when Colonel Chase came in—dear Colonel Chase, what wrong thoughts I have had about him too, for I thought he wasn't meaning to come to my exhibition at all, and as for buying anything! But it was all Error. Let me see, where was I? I had gone out, but I kept just peeping in as I walked about outside. . . . So Colonel Chase came in and soon he bought Golf Links, Wentworth, and then dear Florence Kemp (I'm getting so much drawn to her) bought 'Oh to be in England now that April's here' and looked at me so lovingly and sympathetically."

"Mind again!" crowed Mrs. Bliss.

"Yes, and then who do you think? Lady Appledore and Miss Jobson. She thought so highly of them—I was introduced to her afterward and she implored me, almost, to go and sketch in the Park at the Grange—and

bought the Curfew tolls the knell, and told Colonel Chase, so the boy informed me, that he should certainly buy Geraniums, which was a guinea. I think perhaps he only meant to buy one——"

"But Mind took him by the hand and led him up to Geraniums," said Mrs. Bliss.

"Yes, it really looks like it," said Miss Howard, "or anyhow Lady Appledore did. Oh, Mrs. Bliss, how untrustful I was yesterday, thinking that nobody cared. I shall go down again after lunch, and I sha'n't be a bit surprised to find that somebody else has come in and bought some more. Sixteen sold already and within twenty-four hours: nearly one an hour! Or do you think I ought not to go down this afternoon but leave it all to Mind? Which would Mind like best?"

Mrs. Bliss uttered a peal of mental laughter.

"Sweet one, Mind loves you to do whatever gives you most joy and happiness," she said. "Just deny evil, depression, unhappiness, which don't exist. Didn't I tell you that all would be harmony and prosperity at your lovely exhibition if only you trusted Mind?"

"But I didn't," said Miss Howard, contrite but still joyful. "I gave Mind up yesterday: I remember telling you so."

"No, you only thought you did, and that was Error, as is now proved. I worked away at your Error yesterday and I knew it would be removed. And the pretty gong—such a beautiful sonorous note—has sounded, and here's Mrs. Oxney come to scold us for not going in to lunch, and to hear your good news."

Mrs. Oxney was seriously alarmed to hear that so many pictures had been sold, and that Miss Howard apparently was not certain whether Pussy-dear was among them. Miss Howard, as a matter of strict fact, was quite sure Pussy-dear was still in the market, but it would be good for Mrs. Oxney to have a little fright owing to her remissness.

"There was such a crowd of purchasers," she said, "and really those little red stars to show pictures were sold were being put up here, there, and everywhere. I should not wonder if I had to get another supply of them. But Pussy-dear may be unsold still. I don't think Lady Appledore bought it."

"And has the Countess of Appledore been among your visitors?" said the awe-struck Mrs. Oxney. "Dear me, what I've missed by not going down this morning! I must put on my hat directly I've had a bite of lunch. . . . Oh, Mrs. Bliss, but you're walking without a stick, and moving along so that I can scarcely keep up with you! I never saw such an improvement. Dr. Dobbs will be pleased with you. I declare it's like one of his own conjuring tricks. You've got reason to be thankful to Bolton Spa."

Colonel Chase came back with a sound appetite for tea, after the mere snack by the wayside, shared with the birds, and heard the new and gratifying intelligence that the button queen staying at the Warwickshire had bought two more pictures, and that Mrs. Oxney had secured Pussy-dear, a thing she would never have done had she not seen the button queen regarding it with an

admiring eye. Owing to Mrs. Bliss's deceitful conduct with regard to his pedometer, he addressed no conversation whatever to her, and had only the shortest and coldest replies for her when she spoke to him, for if there was one thing he disapproved of (and indeed there were many) it was anything that savoured of deception. But his displeasure seemed to have no effect on one who basked in the effulgence of Mind, and, though his attitude was most marked (for he was full of agreeable conversation for everyone else, including Mrs. Holders) it may be considered doubtful if she even noticed it. As he had been unable to get out of his purchase of Golf Links, Wentworth, for the leapfrog boy refused to refund a penny of his takings, it was best to be congratulatory to Miss Howard and console himself with the fact that there were now many financial victims of the Green Salon. Another reason for being pleasant to her was that he wanted to learn more about her little place in Kent.

"My Geraniums!" he said (grasping the nettle, so to speak, for it was the guinea that smarted most), "I was delighted to secure Geraniums, and much gratified to find that Lady Appledore, with her fine taste, approved my choice. One of your masterpieces she said, Miss Howard. Where did you paint that? I cannot remember seeing a bed of geraniums of such wonderful brightness here. Perhaps it was at your little place in Kent."

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one of himself, one hand holding a rifle and one foot in a beautifully polished boot on the famous man-eater. It hung at present in the dining room at Wentworth just opposite his table, but Mrs. Oxney could put Pussy-dear there when it was removed to the gallery room at The Croft. He felt that he might even change his name to Howard-Chase.

Miss Howard was certainly the heroine of the day, and to none was she more worshipful than to Florence Kemp. For a couple of weeks now Florence's admiration of her had been ripening into a shy and silent adoration, and this afternoon, as the drawing room emptied, she felt that it could be stifled in silence no longer but must be allowed to begin expressing itself. Miss Howard must know in what tender esteem she was held, and how Florence longed to dedicate her affection by open avowal. She aspired to intimate friendship, and if that was out of reach, she wanted definite and indulgent permission to cherish and serve. Miss Howard (who surely would permit herself to be Alice for the future: that would be something) seemed to her the incarnation of brilliant existence: she could improvise, she could paint and sell those beautiful little sketches she dashed off so easily, she was gay and independent, and self-reliant. Then again how picturesque was the background she had several times indicated of an ancestral home to which she was evidently so much attached, though she accepted without unavailing regrets the penury which debarred her from living there. But all these gifts and qualities and conditions were but little decorations and fineries

fitly adorning the surface; admirable accessories and attributes of the adorable. Florence felt, moreover, with the infallible certainty of instinct, that the other was not one who cared much or indeed at all for the companionship or affection of men, and in this she recognized a secret kinship of nature with herself. Yet at present Miss Howard had no adoring friend, or she would not be living at Wentworth in this unattached manner, and Florence longed to take a place that was clearly vacant.

The drawing room was empty now but for these two: Mrs. Bliss had been the last to go, smiling herself away, and Florence's virginal heart rose into her throat as she took the first step and moved across to an empty chair by Miss Howard, at the thought that a place next and close to her might possibly become hers by right.

"Oh, Miss Howard," she said, "I must tell you how I love your pictures. And I want you to do me a great favour: I want you to let me come down with you tomorrow, and to advise me one to buy. I did get one, such a precious one, this morning, but I must have another, and I should like to have the one you recommend. Is it very bold and forward of me to ask for your advice?"

Miss Howard was by no means surfeited with success: she was quite capable of assimilating more.

"Of course you shall have my advice," she said, "and it's sweet of you to want any of my little daubs."

"Little daubs!" said Florence in a sudden ecstasy of irony. "Aren't they horrid little daubs? How I envy your gift: it must be too lovely to sit down and make beautiful things like you."

Miss Howard had already observed a little diffident signalling going on from Florence, but this vigorous waving of the flag rather astonished her, for she had looked on Florence as too deeply consecrated to the service of an entirely selfish father to have any vivid emotional interests of her own. But as her "beautiful things" witnessed, sentimentality was a magnet to her, and now she jumped to it like iron filings.

"Oh, but how dear of you to think of me like that," she said. "And in a way you're right. It is lovely, anyhow, to want to make beautiful things."

The firelight shining more encouragingly as the dusk deepened outside made admirable conditions for the growth of intimacy. Florence was naturally reserved, but like most reserved women, when once the cork came out it made an explosive exit, and a stream of bottled-up effervescence followed.

"And it's not your painting only," she said, "or your music, which makes you so wonderful, but you, you yourself, and your self-reliance and independence. Oh, how I should envy all your gifts if they weren't yours. How I've watched and admired you all this last fortnight since we came here! And this evening I simply could not help myself: I had to tell you. You may laugh at me if you like, but please don't."

Florence gave a gasp of astonishment at her own boldness, wondering whether she had only made the most dreadful fool of herself. If she had, well, there it was, and she would just have to search for the cork which had popped so magnificently, and bottle herself

up again. But instead of so lamentable an end to this burst of self-expression, Miss Howard's cork showed signs of popping too; it did not fly forth with the vigour of Florence's explosion, but there was a little fizzing at its edges.

"Indeed I sha'n't laugh," she said. "I think it's delightful of you to like me, and to tell me so. As for self-reliance and independence, I've got no one to depend on, so I must rely on myself. You've got your father——"

"Would you rely on him if he was yours?" asked Florence.

"But you're so devoted to him. I often have admired the way you give yourself to him——"

"I don't," said Florence with all the candour of devotion. "I don't give, he takes. We thoroughly dislike each other——"

"My dear——" began Miss Howard.

"But it's true, and it's such a relief to be able to tell anybody that. I don't think anyone was ever as lonely as I am. I long to get away from him: he surrounds me, cuts me off. He wouldn't miss me: anyone who would read to him and fill his thermos flask and tuck in his rug would do just as well. I have thought sometimes of trying to get a nurse for him, and having a life of my own. It's you with your lovely independence that put it into my head. I could do something of my own then. It isn't as if he liked me: that would be different. In ten days now I suppose we shall go to Bournemouth and stop there till we go to Buxton about Easter."

"But he may get better and then you would settle

down. Didn't you say you had a flat in Kensington Square?"

"Yes, but it has been shut up all these years. Besides, he wouldn't know what to do with himself if he got better. And all the time we're at Bournemouth I shall be wishing I was back here."

Something in this touched Miss Howard with a sort of need. Her cork began to fizz a little more.

"So shall I," she said.

"No! But how perfectly wonderful!" said Florence. "Will you really? And will you say 'Florence'?"

"Yes, if you'll say 'Alice.' "

"Oh, Alice!" said Florence.

They kissed, and then neither of them knew what to say next in a situation which was new to them both. In slight embarrassment Alice, still holding Florence's hand, began out of habit to warble something.

"Oh, sing something or play me something," said Florence. "Sit down at the piano and make something beautiful. Improvise."

It was a relief to do something and Alice went to the piano.

"Shall I?" she said. "Just anything that comes into my head?"

"Please, and may I sit where I can see you as well as hear you?"

Alice made her light butterfly excursions up and down the keys, and from the lounge outside Colonel Chase heard these familiar noises. His mind was now made up to begin his romantic wooing, and the sooner he took

it in hand the better. He softly opened the door, and stole in: there was Miss Howard with her eyes dreamily fixed on the ceiling, looking really quite attractive, and there was that tiresome Miss Kemp gazing at her as if she was some beautiful vision, and herself, so thought Colonel Chase, as if she was some large swooning frog. He set himself where he could look at Miss Howard too, and put on the sort of face which concert-goers wear when they listen to slow movements by Beethoven, an expression of remorse and reverie. So there they all sat till the stream of inspiration ran dry and ended in a minor chord. Miss Howard sighed: they all sighed.

"Beautiful!" said Colonel Chase. "Very fine. Dear me. A great treat."

Miss Howard raised her eyes from the contemplation of the minor chord, and smiled at Florence, quite ignoring the colonel.

"Did you like it, dear?" she said.

"Don't stop," said Florence.

So Miss Howard went on again in another key, while her two lovers settled down to sit each other out. In the middle of the next improvisation a maid came in to tell Florence that her father wanted her, but she did not move, and only whispered "Hush: presently." Then the evening paper was brought in for Colonel Chase, and he let it lie unread, and gazed at various points of the ceiling, and strangled a yawn. At the end, which did not come for a long time, for a perfect flood of half-forgotten fragments poured into Miss Howard's mind, she closed the piano and got up with a gay laugh.

"Florence, darling, you sha'n't work me and bully me any more," she said, and perched herself airily on the arm of Florence's chair.

"Too lovely, darling," said Florence. "Thank you."

"Thank you, indeed," said Colonel Chase with an air of correcting Florence. "Exquisite! What a gift! Never shall I forget your accompaniment to my ghost story."

This was a pretty direct hint that he should be asked for his ghost story, but nobody expressed the slightest desire to hear it.

"What a delicious frock you've got on," said Florence, as if Colonel Chase was nonexistent.

"Do you like it, dear? So glad," said Alice. "But gracious me, look at the time. I believe the dressing bell must have gone, and we never heard it."

"Something better to listen to," said Colonel Chase, very handsomely.

"Dearest, we must fly then," said Florence, and away they flew arm in arm, leaving the baffled colonel alone with his evening paper. He searched his memory in vain for an occasion on which his compliments and attentions had met with so indifferent a reception.

CHAPTER VIII

THE tonic of this declared devotion proved itself to be a wonderful stimulant to Florence in her revolt against parental tyranny: it was as if she was taking a course of psychical strychnine, and every hour almost saw some fresh rising. She told her father that she had not been able to come to him when he had sent for her just now because Miss Howard was playing to her and that when she had finished it was time to dress for dinner: and she paid him the briefest of bedside visits that night, leaving him to drink lemonade or eat rusks or concentrate on the power of Mind or go to sleep or lie awake, just as he pleased, and off she went for a long talk till after midnight with Alice. She flowed into confidence, she babbled and expanded in new-found freedom of speech, after these sealed up and suppressed years: it was the richest joy to reveal to Alice all the little flutterings of her soul which hitherto had groped in dusk and silence.

Next morning she did not wait to accompany Mr. Kemp in the bus down to his bath, but started off earlier to walk down with Alice to the Green Salon. There a very pleasing tussle took place, for Alice, after selecting Dewy Eve for her, as the most creditable Howard that still remained unsold, absolutely refused to be paid for it. She would really be very much hurt if Florence (obsti-

nate Flo!) would not accept it, and so with a squeezing of Alice's hand obstinate Flo did accept it, and instantly bought Gloaming (which made a beautiful "pair") on her own account. Alice said this was a very shabby trick, but Flo was firm, and so two more red stars were needed. A third was presently required, for Alice determined to give June's Glory to Mrs. Bliss as a slight recognition of the service rendered by Mind. After lunch Florence gave the leapfrog boy the daily wage and sent him off to amuse himself as he liked, while she enjoyed the office of custodian, sitting on his high stool with the nearly exhausted toilet roll and the pill box of the few remaining red stars (slightly sticky), in order to be doing something for her new friend. There was not much to do, for visitors were few, but as compensation they had the Green Salon almost entirely to themselves.

Mr. Kemp, all that day, naturally felt himself the victim of a series of atrocities, for he had to get in and out of the bus without Florence's aid, in the afternoon he had to read to himself instead of being read to, and fall asleep alone, and personally to ring the bell, before doing so, to ask a maid to bring him his second thickest rug. Then again the move to Bournemouth was to take place in only nine short days from now, and it was high time to begin looking up the journey, and settling whether it would be more comfortable to leave Bolton in the morning and lunch in the train, thus arriving at Bournemouth in time to have tea and rest before dinner, or leave Bolton directly after an early lunch and only get into Bournemouth at a quarter to eight at night.

Then there was the further alternative of sending Florence on in the morning with the luggage, while he followed later. This would save him waiting about at draughty stations while she got luggage labelled and collected, and she would have time to unpack for him at Bournemouth before he arrived. True, he would be obliged to open and shut windows in the railway carriage for himself, and hail and personally take a taxi for crossing London, but if he provided himself with plenty of small change he believed he could manage it. These studies in comparative fatigue were very puzzling to pursue alone: it was scandalous of Florence not to be at hand, for she knew so well what sort of thing tried him most.

As he turned over the pages of his Bradshaw, the small print of which, he was sadly afraid, would very likely give him a headache from eyestrain later on, he lit upon a series of stations printed in rather larger type: these were Bolton Spa, Reading, Basingstoke, Southampton, Bournemouth. He gazed at this revelation in astonishment, for there appeared to be trains from here to Bournemouth by these lines and junctions which would convey him there without a single change. He had for several years now gone at the end of his Bolton cure to Bournemouth, but Florence had looked up the trains and they had always travelled up to London and changed stations there. At the moment of this dazzling discovery she and Miss Howard came prattling into the lounge, having closed the Green Salon for the day.

"Florence," he said excitedly, "please verify this for

me at once. There seems to be a train which goes from here to Bournemouth without change, and all these years you have taken me up to London. Look: 11:35 A.M. from Bolton."

Florence held out a casual hand for the Bradshaw and continued speaking to Alice.

"Let's have tea at once, dear," she said, "and then we can have a stroll afterward: you must have a little more walk, so good for you. What is it, Papa?"

"I beg you will attend," said he shrilly. "At the top of the page there."

Florence, not attending, dropped the Bradshaw, and the page of the epoch-making discovery was lost.

"How careless you are," said Mr. Kemp. "Now we shall have to search for it all over again. And I don't know where you've been this afternoon: not near me, anyhow. I've had to forage for myself whenever I wanted anything."

"You've foraged very successfully if you've really found out a wonderful train," she said. "Whereabouts was it?"

Mr. Kemp's excitement was very excusable: even his ill temper might be pardoned, for it was a long time since so important a railway discovery had been made.

"Pick up the Bradshaw and give it me," he said. "Very stupid of you. And I don't know the page: it wasn't on the ordinary Bolton page."

"Try the index," said Florence, "if you want to look it up yourself. Won't you bring it into the drawing room? Tea is ready, and we'll find it there."

"Certainly not," said he, "I could not touch any tea till I've found it again."

"Very well: bring it in when you've got it," she said, "and I'll see if it's right."

She joined Miss Howard in the drawing room, where others were assembling, while Mr. Kemp in the lounge fruitlessly searched the innumerable pages, and it was not till daylight began to grow dim and tea cold that his tragic face appeared at the door.

"And here's Mr. Kemp at last," said Mrs. Oxney pleasantly. "Why how late you are, Mr. Kemp, and whatever's happened? You look so worried."

He explained the nature of the catastrophe.

"Most disastrous," he said. "I distinctly saw the train, and I've searched and searched, but can't find it again."

"Well, I'm no use," said Mrs. Oxney. "Bradshaw's a sealed book to me and always has been. How anybody can make it out, I don't know. Send away that tea, Mr. Kemp, and have a cup of fresh."

"I don't really want any," he said. "11:35 A.M. from Bolton. I saw it, and then my daughter dropped the Bradshaw."

"Things do fly out of the hand sometimes," said Mrs. Oxney. "And what's the colonel been doing?"

The colonel had been walking, and the record on the pedometer (he glanced darkly at Mrs. Bliss, who only smiled in return) was satisfactory. Florence and Miss Howard, seated in a remote window seat, took no notice of anybody, and presently they got up and moved to the door.

"We're going for a little stroll, Papa," she said. "Miss Howard is taking me to the place where she painted Gloaming. Do you want anything done for you in the town?"

"I beg you will not go out till you have found the train," said he. "My eyes are getting very tired: I feel I shall have a headache soon. Go on looking for me, Florence; read every page carefully."

"I'll find it when I come in," said Florence. "Don't fuss, Papa."

He could only gasp in sheer astonishment at the idea that he could be thought fussy.

The two friends went down across the garden and the fields below it to the site of Gloaming. It was gloaming already: they would see the spot just as it had looked when it inspired Alice, though she had painted it in the morning. There was a nail-paring of a moon in the west, and they duly curtsied to it and sometimes Alice sang staves of song, and sometimes they walked arm-in-arm and then exuberantly *chasséed* for a few steps. This dawn of an emotional attraction, rendered and responded to, excited and rejuvenated Florence, the repressed and unconsidered: she suddenly found the drab of her dull and monotonous existence shot with colour: she expanded and blossomed with the warm sense of giving herself to someone who wanted her not for service but for free comradeship. Her virginal heart seemed to sprout with fresh growth under these fruitful showers. She skipped and *chasséed* beneath the sickle moon, rather out of breath but enraptured.

"It's new life, darling," she panted as, quite exhausted, they dropped to a more sober pace, "and it has gone to my head: I'm tipsy with it. Obstinate, tipsy Flo! And I've got, oh, such a delicious plan in my head, but I sha'n't tell you a single word about it for fear it shouldn't come off."

"Oh, you must tell me, Flo," said Alice. "I must share it with you. Please!"

"Not if you said please a hundred times."

"Obstinate Flo!" said Alice, pretending to pout. "I don't like you any more. You shall be Miss Kemp again. Good-evening, Miss Kemp."

"Good-evening, Miss Howard. So pleasant just to have met you before I go away to Bournemouth next week."

"The same to you. . . . But do tell me the plan. Please, please, please, please. . . . Oh, here's the place where I painted the trumpery little sketch you were so obstinate about. Obstinate Flo: O. F."

"Which stands equally well for Old Fool," said Florence.

"Well, it's not my fault if it does. The stream, do you see, and the woods beyond, and just the top of the steeple of St. Giles's. It was just a month ago, at the time of the last new moon. Dear slim girlie of a moon, little did I think that when next you came round I should be here again, but not alone."

Florence replied with a hug first.

"But I think your sketch is far more beautiful than the original," she said. "You've left out that ugly siding,

with the roof of the station, and filled it with poetry instead."

Alice put her head a little on one side and half closed her eyes.

"Have I made it poetical?" she said. "How dear of you to think that. I painted it as I *felt* it was. And I didn't feel the station so I left it out."

"You made a perfect poem of it," said Florence. "You always put yourself into your sketches. . . . Oh, the station. May we pop in for a moment as we're so close, and then I can find out about poor Papa's train. How I hate trains that go away from Bolton while you are here. But perhaps, who knows——"

She broke off.

"Why do you stop?" said Alice. "Oh, I guess! What you were going to say concerns the plan. Doesn't it now?"

But Flo was just as obstinate as ever, and Alice again pretended to be cross, and wouldn't let O. F. take her arm, and was very cold and polite. Indeed there was quite a quarrel for exactly two minutes, at the end of which obstinate Flo admitted that she stopped because what she was going to say did concern the plan in a sort of a way but that it would be very mean of Alice to try to guess it. So Alice relented and said she would not bully her any more, and they skipped and sang again. Then going into the station they found that a portion of the 11.35 A.M. train went to Bournemouth every day without any changing, just as it had done for the last ten or twelve years, so that Mr. Kemp need never have gone

up to London at all. They tripped back to Wentworth, where Colonel Chase was getting quite anxious about Miss Howard's being out so late, but appeared not to care at all how late Miss Kemp was out.

Her father had gone to his room, where he was resting after the visit of his masseur. He gave her one glance and then in dead silence continued his search in Bradshaw. The silence, rightly considered, was a chorus of reproaches.

"You need not bother about that train any more," she said. "I went to the station and found out about it. It leaves here at 11:35, and there's a through carriage to Bournemouth."

His sombre face brightened.

"That is good news," he said. "But are you quite certain? Who told you?"

"The station master."

He handed her the open Bradshaw.

"He ought to be reliable," he said. "But my mind would be easier if I saw it confirmed in Bradshaw."

"But you found it there yourself," said she.

"I certainly thought I did. But it is very mysterious that I could not find it again. Take the book carefully and don't drop it this time, and go on, please, from the page at which it is open. My eyes are aching sadly, and I had no tea to speak of. Is it a new train?"

"No, it's been running for years."

"You mean to say that we might have gone by it last year and the year before, and have saved me all the agitation and fatigue of crossing London?"

"Yes," said Florence.

Mr. Kemp felt justly indignant.

"I do not expect much from you, Florence," he said, "and if I did I shouldn't get it. But considering my condition, my utter helplessness, I do think you might have taken the trouble to find this out before. You would have saved me much: last year, I remember, it was a full week before I recovered completely from the fatigue of the journey. But I make no complaints. And is there a luncheon car on the train, or shall I have to take my lunch with me?"

"I didn't ask," said Florence. "There is plenty of time to find out. You are not going till the day after tomorrow week."

"A rusk, please," he said. "I had no tea. I am surprised you did not think of ascertaining that. These rusks are not quite fresh. No crispness . . . Florence, I am not sure, but I think my knee is moving a shade more easily. Do you consider that is the effect, if I am right about it, of Mind or massage?"

"Perhaps a little of both," said Florence cautiously. "Mind may be doing it and massage helping you to believe it, or it may be the other way round. They seem to go together in Mrs. Bliss's case."

Mr. Kemp closed his eyes for a moment. His masseur had already been treating him so now it was Mind's turn.

"Yes, I think they do," he said, "so why shouldn't they go together in my case? Let me see: Mind denies evil pain; there is no pain in Mind, there is no Mind in

pain. Mind is all, all is Mind. Hence there is no pain. . . . Certainly Mrs. Bliss's improvement has been marvellous. I am not sure that I should like to progress quite as quickly as that, for I should be afraid that something else was developing. But I feel sure that I have been on the up grade this last week, though it would be more satisfactory if I knew exactly what caused it. I could then have more Mind or more massage accordingly. I think that at Bournemouth I shall have no massage at all for a week, but work at Mind, and note very carefully if any change takes place."

He thought over this, still muttering incantations, then he shook his head.

"Even then it will be very difficult to be certain," he said. "If there is improvement it may only be the after-effect of Bolton. Or indeed, if I seem to be worse that may be after-effect. Sometimes the first week after the treatment is over is very discouraging. I do not know what to do."

Florence had been turning over the pages of Bradshaw. At this moment she found the long-sought train.

"I've got it," she said. "And there's an asterisk opposite it which means luncheon car."

Mr. Kemp gave a sigh of relief.

"That's a great weight off my mind," he said. "I was almost beginning to fear I had had a hallucination, and that the train did not exist. I should have trusted Mrs. Bliss, who told me she knew all would be well. You had better go to the station again to-morrow, and see about

engaging a place in the luncheon car. It would never do to leave that to chance, for if the luncheon car happened to be full when we joined the train, it would be no better than if there was none at all. Get one of those tables for two. They give more room than two places at a table for four. And you never know who may be next you."

Florence turned down the corner of the page, for her father would certainly want to verify this all over again for himself, and, reënforcing her courage with the thought of Alice, divulged her plan.

"I'm going to make a proposal to you, Papa," she said, "which I think may surprise you a good deal."

"Then I beg you will not," said Mr. Kemp nervously. "A surprise always means something unpleasant and agitating."

"It needn't agitate you at all," said Florence, "if you just keep calm, and talk it over quietly. I don't believe you will find it unpleasant."

He clenched his hands.

"Make haste then," he said hoarsely. "Suspense, as you ought to know, wears me out more than anything."

"I don't want to come to Bournemouth with you," said Florence. "I want you to take a nurse instead. A nice one who would be a companion to you as well."

Mr. Kemp shut his eyes. Some idea of invoking Mind occurred to him but he knew he could not manage it.

"Quite impossible," he said.

"No, not at all impossible," said Florence. "She would look after you much more skilfully than I can and she would have nothing else to do."

"But you have nothing else to do," said he.

"We won't argue about that," she said. "But I really believe a good nurse would suit you much better than I do. I think you would soon find yourself much more comfortable."

He opened his eyes again: Florence was speaking in a calm confident voice which impressed him.

"Do you really think I should?" he asked.

"I think it is quite worth trying."

He felt he could now summon Mind to his aid. Naturally, if he would really be more comfortable, Florence's idea was not impossible at all: it was, on the contrary highly likely. And if the nurse did not suit him Florence could come back at once. But there were other things to be considered too.

"But then there is the expense," he said. "I should have to pay her wages, should I not, and there's her keep as well. That will be a great drain. You have your own money to pay for your keep, as your poor dear mother left you half her fortune. I should be very poor indeed if I have to pay for a nurse: indeed I don't think I could do it. Of course, if you think that I should be more comfortable with a nurse we must consider it very carefully, but we must not let the idea run away with us, and not consider the expense."

"I will help you with that," said Florence.

"Well, that is very generous of you, though perhaps it is no more than fair, considering how your poor mother left her fortune. By the way, what will you do with yourself?"

"I should stop on here for a little," said she, "and then very likely I should go to live in my flat in Kensington Square. There are a couple of servants there all the time and we've not been there for more than a few weeks during this last year. Let us try my plan. I don't mean to cut myself off from you at all: I will come down to Bournemouth when you are there, and often pay you visits in your hotels. But I want to have some sort of life of my own."

Mr. Kemp suddenly remembered he had not been pathetic, for his brain had been entirely occupied in trying to picture all that this change would mean. Of course a trained nurse would listen to the recital of his symptoms with much more perception and insight than poor Florence: if he felt that tiresome numbness in his right arm she would be able to reassure him with real authority, that it was not the approach of general paralysis whereas Florence could only recommend him to think about something else. And she had no true understanding of his endless symptoms: her robust uninteresting health did not realize the possible significance of a pain in his left side or a throbbing in his throat. But she must not imagine that he was not deeply hurt at her proposed desertion of him. Desertion; that was the keynote.

"You have wounded me," he said. "I had thought that you and I were so happy together and that you felt it to be a privilege to minister to the needs of your crippled old father. It would not have been for long. I know that my life hangs by a thread. But I was wrong: you want to be quit of me before my death releases you."

Florence got up. She knew quite well what she was about.

"If you feel like that, Papa," she said, "I give up the idea altogether. We go to Bournemouth together the day after to-morrow week by the luncheon-car train. I will see to the seats."

Mr. Kemp saw he had gone too far. The notion of a pleasant nurse, to whose maintenance Florence contributed, had begun to assume attractive colours in his mind. He visualized a comprehending woman, who entered into his sufferings, and who would bring novelty into Buxton and Bath. Dear Florence often bored him: she listened in a most perfunctory manner to the recital of ailments that were familiar to her, and could not guess, from her ignorance of medical knowledge, what new complications they might foreshadow. He must push in that bleating *vox humana:* it had been too loud.

"I beg you not to be so hasty, dear," he said. "Anything in the nature of hurry always unsettles me. Take the two seats in the luncheon-car of course: we shall want two seats for me and another however we settle this. You have told me that you think a trained nurse will be able to look after me better than you can do, and we must not reject your idea in that offhand manner. We will think it over quietly to-night, and to-morrow morning while I am having my reclining bath you must talk it over with Dr. Dobbs and get his view. You had better ring him up at once and make an appointment with him for to-morrow. Tell him it is very urgent—for indeed we have not got too much time if this all has to be settled

in nine days—and say you will come at whatever time suits him. You could slip across after dinner to-night, if he is booked up all morning to-morrow. Indeed, that might be the best plan: you had better telephone to him at once. Very urgent. I will try to get a little rest now, but my hour for resting after massage has been sadly encroached on. At dinner you shall tell me what you have arranged."

Florence was at the door when her father called her back.

"My rusks," he said. "They have lost their crispness again. The tin should be placed open for half an hour in front of a good fire, but not too close."

There was much suppressed excitement and sense of unrest at Wentworth after dinner when it was known on what errand Florence was going to see Dr. Dobbs that very evening: Mrs. Oxney said that the atmosphere reminded her of that of the three days before the beginning of the Great War; for momentous decisions were being made which might alter the whole course of people's lives and nobody could be certain what would happen next. Mr. Kemp felt strongly that Mind should be consulted as well as Dr. Dobbs, and accordingly went into the pros and cons of the scheme very carefully with Mrs. Bliss, and then asked her whether she could obtain any guidance from Mind. It was clear from the way he put the case that so far from thinking it impossible any longer, his personal inclination was all for it: the idea of having a trained listener always at hand whom he could regale with his symptoms, and who was paid (by Flo-

rence) to listen to them now strongly attracted him. It was equally clear that Florence was eager to resign these privileges which had been hers for so long. Father and daughters, Mrs. Bliss had also observed, were bored to death with each other, and this state of error no doubt was an impediment to the clear shining forth of Mind. So when she retired to a quiet corner of the lounge, where she closed her eyes and realized that all was harmonious, it took very little time for her to be convinced that Mind was in favour of the scheme. Mr. Kemp was delighted to know that, and by the time Florence came back from her consultation with Dr. Dobbs, it would have needed strong disapproval on his part to have put him off the idea. But as she brought the glad tidings that Dr. Dobbs thought the scheme well worth trying, there was no struggle or antagonism between materia medica and Mind. All, as Mrs. Bliss had known, was indeed harmonious.

Mind, in fact, during the last few days had been going very strong at Wentworth, and Mrs. Bliss had emerged brilliantly from the slight cloud that hung over her on the discovery of how she had got hold of Colonel Chase's pedometer. For since then, during those black days when from morning till night neither visitor nor purchaser came near the Green Salon, Mrs. Bliss had continued serenely confident that Mind was turning a special smile on the unpopulated exhibition and was preparing a peculiarly rich harmony with regard to it. That had triumphantly proved to be the case, and now purchasers had come forward in such numbers that instead of the

Green Salon closing at the end of this week, Miss Howard had determined to keep it open for another similar period. Then again, there was Mrs. Bliss's own amazing recovery as a further witness of Mind's beneficent functioning, and now her repeated assurances that Mr. Kemp, though apparently as lame as ever, was quite well, must be received with respect. Truth was nibbling away hard at his Error, and he would soon find that it was so. This added to the general excitement.

But more thrilling even than the news that Mr. Kemp was quite well, and was therefore going to take a trained nurse with him to Bournemouth, and that Florence was to remain here for the present, was the conjectured state of Colonel Chase's heart with reference to Miss Howard. Mrs. Oxney had long felt certain that from time to time he "had his eye" on her, and had been "considering it," but nothing as yet had come of it, and indeed a week ago she had almost given up the notion when he called her exhibition a blackmailing project, and had thrown doubt on the extempore character of her improvisations.

"I'm afraid he has settled against it, Amy," she had said to her sister on the occasion of his using that unloverlike expression, "for a gentleman doesn't talk like that about the lady of his choice. It would have been a treat to have had a courtship at Wentworth, and perhaps a marriage too."

"We should have lost two of our permanent guests," Amy had said, for she saw the gloomier side of all situations however romantic. "They'd both have gone away."

"Don't be too sure of that," had been Mrs. Oxney's reply. "They might have taken the end of that wing and made a little flat of it, seeing that Miss Howard's country seat is let, and she couldn't have gone to live in the colonel's club. That new bathroom would have come in convenient then. But now I'm afraid it's all over. He asked me only just now whether there was no means of stopping Miss Howard chirping all over the house like a canary."

Then suddenly the whole attitude of the colonel toward the lady had changed. Not only had he paid a visit to the exhibition in which, as a protest against blackmail he had sworn he would never set foot, but he had bought two of the blackmailer's pictures, and had asked no end of respectful questions about her little place.

"And if there's as much as a note sounded on the piano," said Mrs. Oxney to-night, as she and her sister had their usual chat when the guests had gone to their rooms, "you'll hear a door opening somewhere, if the colonel is within hearing, and he'll tiptoe into the drawing room. Why, this morning, I was just dusting the keys, and made a scale up and down with my duster like one of Miss Howard's commencements, and he came peeping in. What disappointment there was in his face when he saw it was only me, and out he went again in a jiffy. He's after her now and no mistake."

Mrs. Bertram finished her Patience: there had been no bridge to-night, for the colonel had sat the whole evening in the lounge talking to Miss Howard and snubbing Florence.

"You may be right, Margaret," she said, "and I'm sure it would be pleasant to let the end of that wing forever, as you may say, and I should be the last to want you not to put in the new bathroom if that was the way of it. But he can't get a word alone with her these days. There's always Miss Kemp sticking to her like plaster. I call it want of tact not to see that she'd be better away. She won't give him a chance."

"Such faces as he makes at her too," said Mrs. Oxney, "when he finds them together, as they always are now. They would scare me out of the room quick enough, not to mention the snubbings. And now Miss Kemp is settling to leave her papa to go to Bournemouth with a nurse, and is stopping on here. I can't but be glad she's staying, for a guest is a guest, but I do wish she'd have the sense to let the colonel have a turn without her. Such friends as she's become lately with Miss Howard, I never saw the like. They go skipping about together like two school girls, and if it isn't 'Alice this' it's 'Flo that.' It would be only friendly if she made herself scarce sometimes. But I wager the colonel's in earnest now, and 'Love will find out the way,' as Mr. Oxney used to whistle when he was after me. Why, if it isn't close on midnight! Just crush the fire down while I put the burglar alarm on the shutters. You mark my words: Cupid will be busy in Wentworth yet. Such a fine man as the colonel is too. I wouldn't hesitate long if I was Miss Howard. She's not likely to get such a chance again."

It was not likely that Cupid's elegant flutterings which were so manifest to Mrs. Oxney should have escaped

the notice of Miss Howard or obstinate Flo, and to Miss Howard they were both gratifying and embarrassing. Gratifying they could not fail to be (for there was no doubt that Colonel Chase was after her), whether she intended to be caught or not. Obstinate Flo and she made a great joke of the strenuous attentions of her swain, as they sat over their usual midnight cocoa, in the bedroom of one or the other, after Mr. Kemp had summarily been made comfortable with his rusks and milk and hot-water bottles and lemonade, and Flo, who had a rough rude gift of mimicry, would affix a cotton-wool moustache to her upper lip and reproduce the imaginary wooings of the suitor, and his respectful kiss when accepted, and Alice would giggle and slap her and say she was a silly girl, and ask her how she herself *could,* but in her heart of hearts she was not absolutely sure that she couldn't. Herein lay the embarrassment, for Flo took it for granted that their friendship satisfied all Alice's emotional needs forever, and it was already settled that after Mr. Kemp's departure they were going off together to spend a fortnight alone at the flat in Kensington Square. Alice rightly interpreted that sojourn as being, in Flo's mind, a sort of honeymoon, a symbol of eternal and exclusive friendship, but now, with Colonel Chase so obviously in earnest, she was not sure whether she looked forward to the adventure with quite the rapture of her partner. Flo was a sweet thing, and the colonel could not possibly be called a sweet thing, and it rather surprised Alice to find that she, who had never seriously felt the need of a man, could be weighing in her

mind, as she certainly was doing, the comparative merits of the permanent companionship of an adoring friend and of a husband. Though she found it difficult to imagine herself saying "yes" to the offer that she felt sure Colonel Chase was ready to make her, whenever that most obstinate Flo gave him a chance, she found it nearly as difficult to imagine herself saying "no."

She put all this to herself as she sat to-night waiting for Florence to come in for cocoa and a chat over her fire. Florence was late, as she thought would most probably be the case, for Mr. Kemp had engaged a sympathetic nurse, and was to leave next morning by the luncheon-car train for Bournemouth: it was therefore certain that a particular suitcase would have to be packed overnight, which must contain all that he could possibly require (with an imaginative margin) on the arduous journey . . . Alice really could not come to any clear decision, for Florence looked down a much longer perspective than that of this little honeymoon in London, and anticipated that at the end of it they would settle to live together, in devoted spinsterhood, as so many women did to whom either the desire or the opportunity for matrimony had not come. It was quite an agreeable prospect, and one which a few weeks ago Alice would have welcomed. But now that the other opportunity was certainly about to offer itself, she saw that though matrimony might not be more permanent, it afforded a certain dignity and completeness which the other lacked. Then too Colonel Chase seemed really to care for her: he bought her pictures, he listened with a rapt face to

her improvisations, and more than once he had preferred to spend the evening talking to her, and trying to get rid of obstinate Flo, than in playing bridge. He had even asked her to accompany him on one of his bicycle rides, and what more solid tokens of esteem could he give? In his judgment they would be very comfortable together, and she could not but respect the opinion of a man who so clearly was an adept in the art of comfort.

There was another embarrassment entirely private to herself: neither of her suitors had any notion of it and as this topic came into Alice's mind she drew back a little from the fire, feeling a sudden flush of heat invade her. This embarrassment was concerned with the ancestral home at Tunbridge Wells. Of late Colonel Chase, keenly interested in all that pertained to her, had often mentioned her little place, asking her gratifying questions about it, and assuming gratifying assumptions, which were very difficult to contradict. Beyond any doubt the answers she had given to his questions and her own allusions to it, now and previously, had made it dreadfully clear to Alice that the little place as it really was differed considerably from the little place he imagined it to be. It was quite true that it was mildly ancestral, since her grandfather, a most respectable builder, had built it (and anyone is at liberty to reckon a grandfather among his ancestors), but it was not quite what Colonel Chase and Mrs. Oxney and anybody who had heard her sigh over the cruel necessity of letting her old home, pictured it. It was quite true also that it had a

rose garden—for who, when all was said and done, could deny that a bed of roses was a rose garden?—and that there were some fine trees just outside the garden, for there were some remarkable old oaks on the common, of which so near a view was visible, and that the dining room where the family portraits hung looked out onto the lawn. The family portraits did hang there: there was one of her grandfather and another of her mother, and though the artists were not known to fame, these were portraits, for in the English language that word was invariably used for pictures of people. Besides, she had distinctly said that there were no Sir Joshua Reynoldses among them . . .

Similarly the little square of plantains, daisies, worm casts and grass in front of the dining room, separating The Croft from the Station Road, could not be more accurately described than by calling it the lawn. Alice had not measured it, and so could not give the actual dimensions even if anyone had asked for them. In the same way it was perfectly true that Mr. Gradge (such was his amazing name), who had taken The Croft on a year's lease at a most moderate quarterly rent, and lived there with his sister, were "my tenants" and Alice had every right to call them her tenants, while the gardener (three mornings a week) and the boy who "did" knives and coals and boots, and spent the rest of his time in the potato patch could not, without long and tedious explanations, have been alluded to otherwise than as "my gardeners." Even the two cucumber frames were, in a manner of speaking, a couple of glass houses.

All these allusions, casually dropped here and there, were strictly founded on fact: indeed they were facts, but it was also a fact, though unknown to Colonel Chase and Mrs. Oxney and all those who had reverentially heard Miss Howard allude to her sober little ancestral splendours, that The Croft was not a Queen Anne manor house but a semidetached villa standing in the Station Road.

It was all rather awkward and, for the life of her, Miss Howard could not imagine how she had got into such a position. She had told no lies, she had hardly been guilty of any culpable exaggeration (except perhaps in the matter of the two cucumber frames), and yet she knew that all Wentworth believed her to have a beautiful little country seat near Tunbridge Wells, the glories of which she had probably dimmed rather than polished. It was like a saga or the poems of Homer which by untraceable processes had grown from small oral beginnings into epics. No one could analyze the psychology of such a growth of the grain of mustard seed into a bird-haunted tree: it grew and that was all that could be said about it. In the same way she had alluded quite casually and infrequently to that lawn and the fine timber and the rose garden and her tenants and her gardeners, and she was credited now with a mansion and a park and a pleasaunce and a host of old family retainers. She could no doubt have instantly nipped this sumptuous growth in the bud by stating the plain fact that The Croft was a semidetached villa, but instead of that she had enjoyed seeing it sprout, and had watered it, and

tilled the ground. Now, at the thought of Colonel Chase's wooing, the little place had become almost like an angel with a fiery sword preventing her entering that possible paradise. For if she consented to marry him it would not be unreasonable in her husband to want to know more of the little place: he might, still not unreasonably, suggest living there on their combined resources, when the lease of "my tenant," which was only a yearly one, came to an end. Sooner or later, and probably very soon, the truth about the little place must come out, and though she had never told any real lies about it, the aggregate of information amounted to a falsehood that was appalling to contemplate. Obstinate Flo, no doubt, had gleaned the same impression as the colonel but that was a situation easier to deal with. If the worst came to the worst and exposure was certain, she could contemplate without intolerable dismay actually telling her that she had got a perfectly wrong idea about The Croft, and had oddly exaggerated to herself its splendours, just as she (dear thing!) attributed all sorts of talents and graces to the character of her poor friend. "I think I could tell Flo that," said Miss Howard to herself, "but I feel almost sure that I couldn't tell Colonel Chase."

These disagreeable reflections were interrupted by the arrival of Florence in a blue dressing gown and slippers.

"Darling, what ages I have been," she said, "and I thought that I would get ready for bed first, so that when I left you I could just hop there and lie thinking

of you and our talk without the interruption of undressing. Dear me! Have you been impatient because I was so long? Do say you have: do tell me that you were furious with me for not coming sooner. But I couldn't help it: Papa has been too tiresome for anything."

"How naughty you are about your father," said Alice. "But tell me about him: I want to be naughty too."

Florence gave her a loud kiss and assumed her father's voice.

" 'Mind you put in a pair of old gloves at the top of the suitcase, Florence,' " she said, " 'for I shall have to go from my carriage to the luncheon car, and anything I touch on the way will be grimy. And my cachets: the ones I take in water after a meal. You had better pack the bottle of them in my portmanteau and give me a couple of them, done up in a screw of paper, which I can put in my waistcoat pocket. And remember to give me a telegraph form addressed to yourself, for in the bustle of departure you may have forgotten something, so it would be well to have a telegraph form handy. I regret that Nurse Babbit only joins me at the station: it would have been wiser if she had slept at Wentworth tonight. My thermos flask with some hot coffee in it must be seen to in the morning, and do not forget to give me some small change for tips . . .' Darling, what a duck he is, and how glad I am that he's going to Bournemouth to-morrow. Now for a happy talk. How sweet of you to have made some cocoa for me! And how weird Colonel Chase-Alice—is not that a good name for him?—was this evening. He can't see that you and I only want

to be left to ourselves. You were delicious with him when you said you knew he wanted to go and play bridge: O. F. knew that you meant that you wanted him to. What do you bet he doesn't buy another picture of yours to-morrow? He's crazy about you, and who wouldn't be?"

Alice would have let all the colonels in the British army go crazy about her and remain unrequited forever, if she could only have felt toward Florence as Florence felt toward her, for she had the perception to see that the worshipper has a far more exciting time than the image that he worships. She felt no atom of condescension or graciousness toward her worshipper, but rather envy at her potentiality for rapture. How amazingly Florence had expanded in the warmth of her own emotion! A fortnight ago, in spite of her sturdy and manly appearance, she had owned a squashed and middle-aged soul: now, though she was still essentially the same, all that had been repressed and nipped in her had opened like a flower. Self-expression had vivified her.

"I'll bet you any picture in the Green Salon that isn't sold," she said, "that Colonel Chase-Alice—how wicked of us!—doesn't buy another. He hasn't got much longer: we close the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, how I love your saying 'we close,' " said Florence. "But I sha'n't love the closing: no more sitting surrounded by your pictures and hoping that no visitor will come in and interrupt."

Alice did not feel that she had ever quite shared this hope, for after all she had not taken the Green Salon

only for the purpose of uninterrupted conversation with Florence.

"Dear little Green Salon!" she said. "I have become so much attached to it. Then what a day's work there will be: we shall have to pack up all the pictures that have been sold and send them to the purchasers."

"Miles of string, reams of corrugated paper like Colonel Chase's forehead, Alice, oceans of ink, books of labels," said Florence appreciatively. "How I shall enjoy it, simply because we shall be doing it together. Everything that we do together is so lovely, just for that reason. And then we go off alone with no one to bother us for a month in London."

"I thought you said a fortnight," said Alice.

"I shall say a year if you're so tiresome," observed Florence, who had said a week originally and then had lengthened it into a fortnight, and now for the first time mentioned a month. "And then I must go to Bournemouth for Christmas. Papa insists on that, for he says that he and I have always spent Christmas together, though for that matter we have always spent every other day together. Christmas means as little to Papa as I do: all there is to it is that he doesn't feel even as well as usual on Boxing Day, because he cannot resist two helpings of rich plum pudding. But I know that by that time Nurse Babbit will be suiting him so well that afterwards I shall be free. So you must come back to me in London again, and we will settle what we do next."

Florence's complete confidence that Colonel Chase hadn't a chance still seemed rather premature to Alice,

and this complete ignoring of this possibility made his prospects appear brighter. Certainly Alice had not determined she would not marry him. And then she thought of the revelation which must be made to him about the ancestral home, and the prospect grew dark again.

"We shall have to have some talks," she said rather vaguely.

"Oh, and I've got such a delicious plan for us to do one day when we're in London next week," said Florence. "I know you'll love it. I will give you one hint, and then you shall guess. It will mean a day in the country at a place you adore."

A rather sickening sense came over Alice that she could make a pretty good guess, but she hoped she was wrong.

"Darling, how can I guess just from that?" she said. "Is it Epping Forest where I did that picture of the trees reflected in the lake, which you liked?"

"No, but there are trees," said Florence, "and pictures too, and roses, only I suppose they won't be out now. I'll give you another hint: Alice's Wonderland. There!"

This made Florence's plan absolutely certain, and so Alice said she hadn't the slightest idea what it was, while she cudgelled her brain to think of any decent excuse for not going with Obstinate Flo to the ancestral home.

"Darling, aren't you a little slow?" asked Florence. "Where else could it be but The Croft? How I long to see the Park ("Has it come to that?" thought Alice) and the lovely rose garden and the dining room with the por-

traits, and your old nursery from which you used to see the sunsets, and learn to love them."

Though Alice had felt that she could perhaps tell Florence the truth about the ancestral home, whereas she could not tell Colonel Chase, the idea of going there with her was a nightmare.

"Oh, that would be fun," she said wretchedly. "But the house is occupied, you see; my tenants are there, and I don't even know them. All arrangements between them and me were made by my—my agent."

"Oh, but they will surely love you to come and look round," said Florence. "Or—oh, what a selfish little beast I am: would it be painful to you to see your lovely home in the hands of strangers? I never thought of that."

Alice was delighted that she had thought of it now, for it made an admirable excuse. She had only to admit to Florence this tearing of heartstrings for her to be overwhelmed with compunction at having suggested so cruel an ordeal.

"I'm quite silly about The Croft," she said. "I know how stupid it is of me, but it would hurt just a teeny little bit. But what does that matter? Of course we'll go."

Florence slid to the ground by her side, and clasped her knees.

"What a pig I am not to have thought of that," she said. "I've got no sensitiveness, no perception. Oh, what a lot you've got to teach me! Of course we won't go! But some day I must go alone: you won't mind that, will you,

darling? I must see your *Kinderscenen*—lovely Reverie by Schumann (or was it Schubert?) you played me—I must see your scenes of childhood—I love everything that tells me more about you."

The prospect opened up by these pretty sentiments was hideous. If Obstinate Flo intended to show a touch of her quality in this passion for seeing The Croft, what would happen to all those pretty sentiments when some taxidriver at Tunbridge Wells whom she directed to take her to The Croft, set her down after a career of about fifty yards at the third house on the left in Station Road? That was too ghastly to contemplate: it would be better, thought Alice, if this fell determination persisted, to tell her straight out that The Croft was not what it seemed and would not repay a sentimental journey. . . . She thought it all over after Florence had said an affectionate good-night some half-dozen times, and had come back after each to tell her something she had forgotten about, and resolved to make this odious disclosure when it could no longer be avoided. She had an uneasy dream in which she and Florence and Colonel Chase all went together hand in hand to stay at The Croft, and found it to be a cottage in a brickfield with only one bedroom. She woke in agonies of embarrassment.

There was little time next morning, until the 11:35 had irrevocably left Bolton Spa station, for embarrassment or anything else except the concerns of Mr. Kemp. Excitement had caused him to pass a night not less troubled than Alice's, and it was not till he had taken

his temperature for the second time with encouraging results that he decided he could undertake the journey. But during these dark watches he had made a further list of memoranda in faint pencillings, and having finished his breakfast by nine, he sat in the lounge and tried to decipher them, with the travelling suitcase open by him on the floor, and Florence ready to perform these last offices.

"Umbrella," he read out. "Yes, as it's fine I want you to take charge of my umbrella, and hand it to me when I am in the train. I will have my two sticks, the pair with crutch handles. Aspirin: I must take ten grains half an hour before I start, and then sit quiet till the bus comes. Otherwise all these movings about and going up and down steps into busses and trains will be agony. Really I ought to have insisted that Nurse Babbit should come here: I do not know how we shall get through without her. Ten grains will be two tablets, Florence; you had better make a note of that. Umbrella, Aspirin, I will cross those out. Monkey . . . It can't be Monkey, I should not dream of taking a monkey in my suitcase. What can that be? And it is a very dark morning. I wonder if it will rain before I am safe in the train. Or is it that my eyes are worse this morning?"

In this very natural agitation about monkey, he got up from his chair and walked straight across to the window without using his sticks.

"Ah, I see now," he said. "It is not Monkey, it is Mrs. Oxney. I want you, Florence, to get Mrs. Oxney to have my room thoroughly searched after I have

gone, to see if you have forgotten to pack anything: last year it was a flannel belt. Now let us get on: we have not too much time."

Mrs. Bliss, who was sitting by the fire, suddenly jumped up with a cry of rapture.

"Oh, Mr. Kemp!" she said. "I knew it would come. You have walked to the window and halfway back again to your chair without your sticks. Mind has conquered Error. Didn't I tell you that you were perfectly well? Now you know it."

Mr. Kemp immediately clutched at the back of a sofa, and heavily leaning on it got back to his chair.

"Dear me, I did walk there without my sticks," he said, "and felt no twinge at all. But then why did I begin to hobble again?"

"Error's last effort to deny health and harmony," chanted Mrs. Bliss. "Oh, how pleased I am that you know you are well. But I must say good-bye, as I am to have one more bath for my dear husband's sake. When next we meet I know I shall see you running about like a boy."

Mr. Kemp shook hands.

"Indeed it was most remarkable, most gratifying," he said—"I must have my *Manual of Mental Science* to read in the train, Florence. Please get it out of the green portmanteau and put it in the suitcase.... Now let us get on: Mrs. Oxney, we've done that. Carpet slippers. You can put them in one of the portmanteaux instead of in the suitcase, for I have decided not to change into them in the train. Daily paper: that explains itself. Pencil:

ah, yes, I shall partly occupy my time with a cross-word puzzle. If I get through it, I can ink it in at Bournemouth. . . . Florence do you realize that I walked to the window without a twinge? Shall I trust to Mind and not have my aspirin?"

"I think I should have the aspirin, Papa," said Florence. "You can trust to Mind just the same and tell yourself that the aspirin can't have any effect. Mrs. Bliss has her baths and massage for her husband's sake."

"True," said Mr. Kemp, much relieved to be excused from this great trial of faith. "So as you wish me to take my aspirin I will do so for your sake."

"Thank you, Papa," said Florence, and went to get a wineglass and some newly decanted water.

The list of agenda and addenda was finished in time to enable Mr. Kemp to sit quiet for a full half hour before the bus came round, and then once more he walked across the lounge without assistance.

"It was a mistake to have had any aspirin," he said reproachfully to Florence, "for I am convinced that I am walking so well entirely owing to Mind. But I took it for your sake: remember to tell Mrs. Bliss."

The bus had been ordered in time to give the traveller a full quarter of an hour at the station: this would not be a moment too much to enable Mr. Kemp to confer with Nurse Babbit, to settle finally and irrevocably what baggage was to come into the carriage with him and what to travel in the van, and rest for a little after these decisions. Florence meanwhile would see the heavier pieces labelled, and after a pause to make sure that all

the labels were duly adhering. Then she had to put a second porter in charge of suitcase, rugs, coats, air cushions, hot-water bottles, daily paper, and all else that was to be handed in to the traveller after Mr. Kemp had taken his seat. Mrs. Oxney, who had also come to the station, made herself very useful, as soon as the train came in, by ascertaining that the conductor of the luncheon car had reserved a table for two. Though all went off without a hitch, as far as could at present be ascertained, Mr. Kemp's face looked drawn and anxious as Nurse Babbit adjusted the window precisely to his liking, and he shook his head sadly at them through the glass as the train moved out of the station.

CHAPTER IX

THE full and glorious noon of the Green Salon had evidently passed: collectors who were anxious to secure Howards for their galleries must have satisfied themselves, and when, on the morning of the day preceding its closing, neither visitors nor purchasers had entered its pictured walls, the friends decided to occupy the remainder of the hours in beginning the packing of the work with little red stars on them. The pill box with these brevets inside was now found to be unaccountably empty, and the custodian when pressed acknowledged that, despairing of employing them for their ordained purposes, he had used them up (so that they should not be wasted) by affixing to the wall behind the door his own initials in red stars. There indeed his initials were, and Alice and Florence spent a considerable time in soaking them off: that was a matter of difficulty for they proved to be of first-rate adhesive quality. But it was done now, and Florence in her homespun Norfolk jacket with no hat had hurried off into the town to purchase string, corrugated cardboard, and brown paper.

Alice was feeling on edge: she had spent a sticky hour in detaching the custodian's odious initials, she was disappointed that the last few days of the Green Salon had been fruitless, and she was worried over the deception

she had been driven to practise on Florence about the ancestral home. That figured itself to her as a black hole in the fabric of life out of which at any moment might pop something surprisingly unpleasant. So while her friend had gone on her useful errand she had nagged at the custodian (on the lines of a wage-earning man behaving like a child) for giving them so much trouble, and the custodian had grown sulky and sat perched on his stool like a ruffled bird in livery with the pip, instead of the brightest boy in Bolton. Yet after all the Exhibition had been a great success, and she thought with gratitude how narrowly she had escaped acting on the diabolical counsel of the young man from the Bolton *Gazette,* who had criticized her pictures without even seeing them, and had advised her to put a quantity of stars on virgin frames in order to encourage purchasers. She had nearly done so: had it not been for Tim and Mrs. Holders, and those mysterious ladies and gentlemen about whom the custodian could remember nothing, she would surely have fallen. Nowadays she knew something of the tangled web of deceit over her fabulous ancestral home, and she was thankful to have been spared further complications over the Green Salon. If she had succumbed she would now be in the power of the sulky custodian.

This Pharisaical reflection had hardly entered her head when there strolled into the Green Salon, just as if he had been the proprietor of the place, the odious young man to whom Miss Howard had in effect said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." But here was Satan in

front of her again and as he looked round at the walls on which twinkled this red milky way, he broke into a broad grin and quite distinctly winked at the artist in a most familiar manner.

The moulting bird had slipped off his stool and produced the roll of toilet paper.

"Sixpence," he said sullenly.

"Press," said the critic.

He turned to Miss Howard.

"Well, miss, you've had a rare success," he said. "I see you took that tip I gave you. I remember telling you to make believe to have sold half a dozen pictures and you'd bring the buyers in all right. Very pleased to have been of assistance, for that tip and my little article did the trick for you. I'm not too proud, I may add, to accept any little recognition you might care to make me."

Miss Howard gasped with indignation. It was really no use attempting, as Mrs. Bliss had recommended her to do, to broadcast thoughts of love in every direction, for Mrs. Bliss had clearly no idea how some situations could play the deuce with atmospherics. But, though powerless to broadcast loving thoughts, she could still remember she was a Howard, and moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue.

"I do remember your advising me to commit that most dishonourable action," she said, "but I am glad to say that your suggestion only appalled me."

This appeared to nettle Satan.

"Oh come," he said. "I gave you a friendly tip, which

I'm sure you took, and now you call me dishonourable. Nasty of you, miss."

Trembling in every limb with the effect of being a Howard, she turned to the custodian.

"Give me the paper of the names and addresses of purchasers," she said. "I want to show it to that (she did not pause at all) gentleman."

A situation of peculiar psychological intensity had arisen. There was Miss Howard in the consciousness of virgin innocence, tempted but unfallen; there was Satan, blandly certain that he had fallen and was a liar too; there was the brightest boy in Bolton, sulky from his scolding, who knew that there had been some amazing hocus-pocus about that cataract of sales on the first day when purchasers appeared, and had been bribed to silence by half a crown. As he produced the paper of purchasers he began to think about Revenge.

Miss Howard spread this register in front of Satan. All the entries were in order, number of pictures sold, purchasers, addresses and "paid."

Satan sniffed.

"Well, some do it direct and some by deputy," he jeeringly observed.

At that, as the custodian thought of the two invisible ladies who had bought two pictures each, and the two invisible gentlemen who had done the same, the whole case became clear to his powerful intellect: he no longer entertained the slightest doubt that Miss Howard had bought the pictures herself by deputy.

"Will you kindly tell this gentleman," said Miss Howard, "how you personally sold all these pictures to different ladies and gentlemen, and that I made no private arrangement of any sort with you."

He hesitated: vengeance was sweet. It was on the tip of his tongue to say what had actually happened. But some of that half crown was still in his pocket, for his daily shillings nearly sufficed for his simple needs.

"That's so," he said. "Ladies and gents came in here one after the other and made their buys, and Miss Howard never said a word to me."

At the moment Miss Howard saw through the open door the approaching figure of Florence carrying the contents of a stationer's shop. She turned her back on Satan, and gave a little silvery laugh.

"Such fun, dear," she said. "This gentleman once advised me to buy some of my pictures myself in order to encourage others, and now he tells me that I took his dishonest advice, and wants me to give him something for his suggestion. A little like blackmail."

She turned to Satan again.

"Miss Kemp is one of the purchasers," she said. "You will find her name there. I'm afraid that without notice I cannot produce more of them. So if this is all now quite clear, perhaps you would pay sixpence for admission, if you want to look at my pictures again. Please do not offer me your apologies, which no doubt you are anxious to do, because I could not accept them. Good-morning."

"Lor', that's a knockout," cried the brightest boy

in Bolton, in enthusiastic admiration of this superb effrontery. (Of course Miss Howard had bought her pictures herself.)

"A little off his head, poor fellow," said Alice, as soon as Satan had gone back presumably to his own place. "Now let us begin our packing, dearest."

"What a monster!" said Florence. "I wish I had been here to tackle him."

"Quite unnecessary, darling," said Alice, still trembling with passion. "Oh, what lovely corrugated cardboard. I always feel it is a shame to use it."

The work of packing so many purchases and making them safe for travel was lengthy, and conduced to meditation except when Alice sat on the scissors or Florence lost the pen for the direction of labels, when it conduced merely to frenzied search. Florence meditated about Alice, and said *"liebster"* to her now and then, when she could not repress her feelings, so that the custodian should not understand. Alice occasionally warbled a phrase of song, but the undercurrent of her mind was occupied with the perfidy of men in general as exemplified by her late visitor. Above that ran a stream of thought concerned with the eternal and infernal subject of the ancestral home, which was daily getting more embarrassing. Only last night she had been practically compelled, in answer to a most inquisitive question of Colonel Chase's, to say that the stables were at some little distance from the house, for short of saying that there were no stables at all (which would have been incredible in a spacious Queen Anne mansion) there was

nothing else to be said. Then, too, Mrs. Oxney hoped before long to spend a day or two with a cousin close to Tunbridge Wells, and she wanted to know if the public were admitted to the Park on any particular day of the week, and whether The Croft was visible from the line. Miss Howard had to give a guarded answer to that: she said that her tenants made their own arrangements about admission, and that she did not know what they were. She added (which was absolutely true), that you could see The Croft on the left of the line as you approached Tunbridge Wells, and in answer to a further pestering from the colonel (how she used to enjoy such pestering once!) that there was no pheasant shooting. It was really a detestable situation for anyone who was not a professional liar, and it seemed to her thoroughly undeserved. She had just let slip a few hints (all founded on facts) about her little place, and it was her audience not she who had distorted them into these monstrous splendours. Colonel Chase was much the worst offender: poor Alice would have been ready to take her oath that she had never mentioned stables at all till he asked about them, or alluded to the shooting, and now her little place had stables at some distance from the house, and though she had flatly denied that there was any pheasant shooting, she felt that she had given the impression that there was plenty of room for it. All the good that had come out of the growth of her little place was that it had enabled her to make up her mind that, with the colonel's present conception of it, it was quite impossible to marry him.

Below these uncomfortable meditations there continued to flow the undercurrent of thought about the perfidy of men, and suddenly it burst up like a geyser onto the surface of her mind, startling her so much that the ball of string with which she was tying up Lady Appledore's Curfew leaped from her lap and rolled away across the floor. She saw it all . . . this violent interest of the colonel's in her little place was contemporary with his industrious wooing of her affections. The base wretch wanted to find out what (as well as whom) he would be marrying.

She gave a hoarse cry.

"Oh, the wickedness of him," she exclaimed. "I will never speak to him again."

Florence thought she was speaking of Satan, and laughed as she retrieved the ball of string.

"I ought to have been here to settle him," she said, "but you did it pretty well, *liebster.*"

"No, I don't mean him," said Alice, gasping. "I mean that base wicked colonel. You know how he's been questioning me about my dear little home. I see it all. He wanted to find out about it before he asked me to marry him. I couldn't have believed it of him, as I hate thinking evil of anybody, but I feel sure it's true. I am never wrong about the sudden intuitions which sometimes come to me."

Though Florence had repeatedly asserted that Colonel Chase was crazy about Alice for her own sake, she soon began to share this intuition, and the wooing which had been to her up till now a huge joke assumed a sinister

aspect. She had intuitions too, and now she remembered that she had never trusted the colonel from the first moment that she set eyes on him, and she was never wrong about her first impressions. She would not quite give up her belief that he was crazy about Alice, but he was certainly crazy to live in her lovely house, and shoot over —no, there weren't any pheasant covers—and be the Squire of the countryside. He deserved—what did he not deserve as punishment for his baseness?

"Punished, punished: he must be punished," said Florence, fiercely folding corrugated cardboard round Geraniums. "And look, darling, at this very moment I'm packing his picture for him. I do call that a coincidence! You mustn't mind about him, he isn't worth it. Punished."

"But it hurts me," said Alice.

"Only because you're so good and it hurts you that a man can have been so wicked," said Florence. "They're like that, you know. I've often heard of men wanting to marry girls because of their money. Base creatures! But it isn't as if you had ever cared about him: you never dreamed of marrying the fat old bicyclist. What are we to do to punish him? That's the point. For myself I shall simply cut him, though I'm afraid he won't think that much of a punishment. In fact he'll prefer it. We must think of something better than that."

Alice again remembered, but with difficulty, that she was a Howard. She moistened her lips.

"I beg you to drop any such idea altogether," she said. "Because he has behaved like—well, like a cad,

that is all the more reason that we should behave like ladies. It will mark the distance between us. If he actually tells me he wants to marry me I shall permit myself a little score in refusing him, but that will be all."

"But you would have done that in any case," said Obstinate Flo. "That's not punishment as I mean it. I want something extra. He must be brought to feel that he's not lost you only, for he never would have got you, but all the wonderful things of yours he would have got if he had got you."

This seemed a very refined and complicated sort of punishment, but as they proceeded with their packings in the gradually fading light of the November day, the shape of it outlined itself to Florence's vindictive imagination. She disliked men, as such, to begin with, she adored her Alice, and what she wanted (as she whittled her idea to a sharp point) was to humble Colonel Chase and exalt her well-beloved by one fell stroke. She had for years suffered dumbly under the yoke of paternal tyranny, and now emancipated she longed, in the manner of a suffragette, to damage a man. Her emotional awakening had quickened her keenness for the combats of life, in which she used mutely to surrender, and the design, yet vague, was that Alice should not only win, but in the hour of victory humiliate her adversary. Florence's chivalry only existed for her own sex, men, as typified by the colonel, had to be beaten and then rubbed in the dirt.

Simultaneously, Alice, though she had told Florence that they must behave like ladies, was following up the

same train of thought. Vengeance was surely compatible, if she could only see how, with perfect gentility. But for the life of her she could not see how. She was startled from her gentle vindictive reverie by a hoarse crowing sound from her friend. Only extreme exaltation, she had already learned, made Florence crow like that.

"I've got it," she cried. "Oh, darling, it's too lovely! He wants to know about your little place, so tell him no end of lies about it. Make it bigger and grander and splendider and magnificenter. A lake: a lot of box-hedges: a moat. Oh, don't you see? Make it a palace with a family vault and a village of tenants, and no entail. And then he'll propose to you, and you'll say no, and he'll be in hell because of what he has lost."

Now it might have been supposed that Miss Howard's own uneasiness about the grandeurs of her ancestral home would have made her recoil in horror from such a suggestion. So for the first moment it did, and she only just checked the exclamation of disdain that rose to her lips. But immediately she saw, like the gleam of a lighthouse over stormy seas, a beam that heralded salvation. If she continued, now voluntarily, to ply the mercenary colonel with visions of splendour and sumptuousness, she could save her face with regard to Florence. All her previous hints about the magnificence of The Croft, which had been causing her such serious agitation, would be merged with all future lies as having been punishment for him. Florence no doubt, at this moment, shared Colonel Chase's illusions about The Croft, but it would be much easier to muddle her up

about them if now, at her suggestion, Alice deliberately magnified its splendours.

"Darling, that would serve him right," she said thoughtfully. "But it wouldn't be truthful. The Croft is really quite a modest little place."

"You *must* do it," said Florence. "He must be punished, and I'm sure there's no better way of degrading him. How lucky he hasn't proposed to you already, when he only knows the truth about The Croft."

Any impulse that Alice ever had to confess to her friend that the truth about The Croft was not known to anyone at Wentworth except herself, vanished. The far better chance was to adopt Florence's suggestion and go on making The Croft more and more manorial until, as might happen, it was necessary to demolish the exquisite old home and reveal it in its true character as a semidetached villa. Florence would be confused by that time: she would not know what magnificence, lawn or lake or park, antedated the colonel's punishment, which she had suggested. But there was Mrs. Oxney to think about as well, for she was one of the greediest imbibers of ancestral grandeur.

"And how about Mrs. Oxney?" she asked. "She will hear it too and get such a false idea about my little home. And if she goes to Tunbridge Wells as she threatened —I mean as she thought she might be doing soon—she would be very much perplexed!"

"Then wait till you get the colonel alone," said Florence brilliantly. "You and me and the colonel, I mean,

for I'm in the plot, and of course I sha'n't believe a word you say. I shall egg you on: I shall make you tell lies."

"It will make me very uncomfortable having to exaggerate so," said Alice with a sigh. But she had been very uncomfortable as it was.

Wentworth was emptying as was usual in late November but there were fresh paying guests coming in next week, and Mrs. Oxney, though she saw no prospect of getting to Tunbridge Wells yet awhile, observed, with strong satisfaction, that Balmoral and Blenheim and Belvoir were already closed for the winter. Mrs. Bliss, having finished the cure she had undertaken for the love she bore her husband, and miraculously better in spite of it, owing to her persistent denial that anything had ever been wrong with her joints, since all was Harmony, left on the day the Green Salon was closed in the happy belief that Mind, and not Mrs. Holders and Tim, had started purchasers. So full of Harmony was she on the morning of her departure that she refused to go to the station in the bus, but set off to walk there (leaving plenty of time in order to enjoy the sweet air) while her luggage was to follow in a handcart. It was well that it did so, for Harmony most unaccountably became Discord in the middle of this pedestrian effort, and produced so realistic a similitude of shooting pains in her hip that she was quite unable to proceed, but stood like a statue, though still smiling, by the side of the road waiting for deliverance. The handcart over-

took her and she was with difficulty hoisted onto it. Precariously balanced on the edge of it, and holding onto her dress basket, she trundled into the station, protesting that she had never enjoyed herself more. A comfortable seat in the train and rest soon brought Harmony back again.

Discussion over her and her gospel raged at Wentworth after she had gone: *pro,* there was the colonel's cold, the success of his ghost story, her own improvement (or was that brine?), and the miraculous sale of pictures: *contra,* her failure to walk to the station, and the fact that Mr. Kemp had not really improved at all, and it was thought that his walking to the window had been a flash in the mental pan. The affair of the pedometer was not mentioned at all, because it always excited Colonel Chase. Tim Bullingdon, supported by Mrs. Holders, said that the whole thing was utter rubbish, and that he would sooner be completely crippled than cured by such charlatanry, and Mrs. Oxney, ever pleasant, said, well, what an interesting talk they had all enjoyed.

An even more interesting talk, more stupendous, more imaginative, was held in the lounge that day after tea. Mrs. Holders and Tim had engagements with masseurs, Mrs. Oxney and her sister retired to their sitting room, where their joint efforts over the evening crossword puzzles were to compete with the solitary genius of Colonel Chase, who had consented for once to try his hand, and in consequence the three conversationalists were the two devoted friends and he. He had settled

down with the paper and a sharp pencil in order to sit Florence out, and proposed to occupy the interval with the defeat of Mrs. Oxney and Mrs. Bertram. "Small Scotch farmers" undoubtedly beginning with "c" was puzzling, and Florence's account of the letter she had just received from her father distracted him.

"He's ever so much pleased, darling, with Nurse Babbit," she said to Alice. "Such bright conversation and so much interested in his case. She feels sure that within a week he will get the good effects of Bolton, but she doesn't think anything of Mind, and says that massage is far more reliable. A most comfortable journey and quite a good lunch. He thinks he has left the small tin that held his night rusks behind, but there are rusks in Bournemouth. . . ."

Colonel Chase made an impatient movement in his chair. Who could concentrate on "small Scotch farmers" beginning with "c," with such imbecile drivel going on? She ought to have gone with her father . . .

Florence was silent a moment.

"Now do tell me more about the garden at The Croft," she said. "I'm beginning to picture it."

Colonel Chase rapidly pencilled in the required word.

"Ha! I've got you to thank for that, Miss Kemp," he said, with unusual amiability. "Your saying the word 'croft' put 'crofters' into my mind. A remarkable coincidence."

"Quite extraordinary," said Florence.

"We don't disturb you by our chatter?" asked Alice.

"Indeed no. Charming conversation, I'm sure," said he, laying down his pencil.

"My dear little house!" said Alice. "I insist on your coming down to see it, Flo, when we are in London next week, for indeed I cannot do it justice. The dining-room windows open onto the lawn, or rather onto a raised terrace walk that runs the length of the house. Then you turn round the corner to the right, and there's the shrubbery with the winding walk through it. All beautiful flowering shrubs, some rare, I believe, but I'm so ignorant. It wants thinning out, my gardeners tell me."

"It sounds delicious," said Florence.

"Charming," said Colonel Chase. "Not half enough flowering shrubs in most old English gardens. Pardon for interrupting you, Miss Howard; pray go on."

"Then you come into the bit of the garden which I love most," said Alice. "Another lawn with a little marble fountain and basin in the middle of it. The sweet cool drip of water on a hot day! What a naughty little girl I must have been, for I bathed in it once. Papa only laughed, but Mamma sent me to bed. On each side are the two long borders, very deep you know, as borders ought to be, with hollyhocks and sunflowers at the back, but sad ravage from the hollyhock disease this summer, I hear. I'm afraid it must be replanted. Then at the end the steps leading down into the rose garden with the box hedge round it. Clumps cut into fantastic shapes, peacocks, and things like that."

"And are there any real peacocks?" asked Florence.

Alice felt she could not manage peacocks.

"Ah, don't talk of them," she said, "for I've no peacocks now. How lovely they used to look sitting on the terrace wall. But they do make such a dreadful screaming, and they used to wake Mamma up in the early summer dawn, and she couldn't go to sleep again. They damage the flowers terribly too, so disappointing for the gardeners. And one day Papa said to me, 'Alice, do you vote for peacocks or gardeners?' I felt like a murderer, though we gave them to friends and they got quite happy homes."

Florence cast a reproachful eye on her friend for not saying that there were flocks of peacocks. But Alice's elaborate explanation almost made amends.

"I'm picturing it all," Florence said. "I am beginning to see it as if I was there. Take me behind the box hedge: isn't the kitchen garden there?"

"Yes: nice old red brick walls, and the glass houses at the end."

"How many?" asked Florence.

Alice sighed.

"Papa was always very particular about the glass," she said. "He liked to eat his own grapes, for then he knew they hadn't been covered with dust in a shop, and picked by goodness knows whom. . . . Let me see. There was the peach house with the pots of strawberries for forcing: we always had strawberries on Easter Day. Then there was the grape house, black Hanburys and muscats, and a third of flowers, bougainvillæa and plumbago climbing up the walls, and regiments of carnations."

Colonel Chase greedily listening began to wonder whether all this would not be beyond their joint means. The cross-word puzzle had long lain unregarded on his knee.

"Terribly expensive, was it not?" he asked. "The garden must have cost a fortune to keep up."

Both the conspirators were at once on their guard against discouraging the colonel: there was really no need for Florence to break in.

"Oh, no," she said. "You told me, dearest Alice, that the gardens were self-supporting."

"Papa used always to say so," said Alice, "for after the house was supplied with flowers the carnations used to be sent up to Covent Garden in great boxes, and they fetched an immense price. Grapes too and peaches. Papa used to say he should have been a fruit and flower merchant."

Colonel Chase was visibly relieved.

"Now take us inside the house," said greedy Florence. "I can't hear enough of it. Oh, it's cruel that you don't live there."

"No use making a fuss," said Alice, "and the same thing has happened to so many of us. Perhaps if I save up for a year or two more, I might be able to live in a corner of it. But for the present it's let and I don't think about it at all bitterly. Indoors, did you say, Flo? Is there a little summer shower which drives us indoors? Let's come in then at the door opening into the rose garden from the library. That will be the nearest way."

This voluptuous improvisation was as brilliant as

anything that Alice could have executed with a great deal of practice on the piano, but it must be remembered that she had already practised diligently on her little place in Kent.

The effect on Colonel Chase was admirable: the evening paper had fallen to the floor, and it was evident that if Miss Howard went on much longer, Mrs. Oxney and her sister would easily win the cross-word race, for he had as yet got no further than "crofters," and one other word along the top. It had also, as the astute Alice had anticipated, a curiously confusing effect on Florence. Florence was already beginning to mix up what she thought was true about The Croft and what she knew was imaginary. Had Alice said there was a rose garden before to-day, or told her about the shrubbery of flowering rarities? "Glass" had certainly been mentioned before but without specification: there was only the impression of glass.

"Yes, come indoors quick, darling," said Florence, playing up admirably, "or you'll get wet, and I shall be obstinate and make you change before you show me round."

Colonel Chase said "pshaw" under his breath: he hated this silly playfulness and wanted to get to work indoors.

"Take care you don't slip on the parquet floor in the library." said Alice, pursuing these pretty fancies. "But just glance at it: cedar-wood parquet, and smells so good. That was Grandpapa Howard's addition: so stravvy of him! But he loved his little library, not large,

you see, but such a pleasant room. The chimney piece looks empty now, but my tenants wouldn't take the responsibility of having the Chelsea figures out. Beauties they were——"

"Quite right of them," said the colonel. "Fine Chelsea is irreplaceable. I should put them in a cupboard myself. How many, Miss Howard?"

"Only four," said Alice. "Poor little shepherds and shepherdesses all in the dark in the strong room at the Bank. But they've got the Queen Anne silver and a few little odds and ends to keep them company and talk over the dear old times. And then we go out across the hall, a pretty staircase, Flo: there is nothing like it at the Victoria and Albert Museum (this was absolutely true), and into the drawing room. Rather long, rather narrow like a gallery."

This was just what Colonel Chase had imagined: telepathic almost.

"And I seem to see Queen Anne furniture again," he interpolated.

"Just a few choice little pieces. But such a ragged carpet, is it not, though it was once a good Aubusson. But Papa would have it used. At the far end is the door into the smoking room."

Mrs. Oxney and her sister came hurrying out of their room at this rich moment.

"We've finished it all but the top right-hand corner, Colonel," she said. "How far have you got? Don't say you've done it!"

Had not four ladies been present Colonel Chase

would certainly have damned two of them for their interruption. He wanted terribly to hear about the smoking room, which would probably be his "den."

"What can the 'small Scotch farmers' be?" asked Mrs. Bertram. "That would give us the clue to the difficult corner."

"Aha!" said he. "I'm not going to tell you that. And the time limit for our competition was dinner. I've been lazy, listening to Miss Howard telling us about her charming little place. Now I shall go up to my room and have a spell at the puzzle."

He picked up Mrs. Oxney's paper which she had carelessly laid down on the table and saw a word or two which might be useful as starting points. He put it down again hurriedly.

"God bless me," he said, "I thought that was my paper. Lucky I didn't see any of your words. And may I remind you, Miss Howard and Miss Kemp, that I put you on your honour not to betray the 'small Scotch farmers.' "

It was no use stopping any longer in the lounge, for the ladies would certainly sit chatting and chattering till the dressing bell sounded, and there would be no chance of getting Miss Howard alone, but he took upstairs with him besides the evening paper the fixed determination to propose to and be accepted by her, on the first possible opportunity. He had once harboured doubts about the size and quality of the little place in Kent, but it was evident now that instead of its being less imposing than he had cynically supposed, it was far more

splendid than he had hitherto allowed himself to imagine. In her talk just now with that podgy masculine friend of hers, it was impossible that Miss Howard should have exaggerated its charms, for she was intending to take her down to see it, and, as she had said, she could not do it justice in description; he was sure it would suit Squire Chase admirably. But he did not care for this friendship which had blazed into such flaming intimacy, and when he was married he would have to make it clear to his wife, firmly, and if she was reasonable, kindly, that though "Kemp" (so he thought of her) had apparently renounced all filial duties to her father for Alice's sake, there must be no question at all of her living with them or of paying more than brief and occasional visits. A man—the husband's friend—making long visits to the house was a different matter, for men effaced themselves all day on the golf links, and hobnobbed together in the host's "den" in the evening: besides a man required a little society of his own sex.

About the result of his suit he had no real doubt, for that would imply an absurd lack of self-respect, and, thank God, he had plenty of that. In the early days at Wentworth, before he had contemplated matrimony, or had heard about the little place in Kent, he had been obliged several times to take no notice of Miss Howard's hints that she could ride a bicycle too with great speed, for he had not wanted to encourage false hopes. Now he regretted not having encouraged this, for they had ceased to be false, and the great plunge would have been easier to take: he would have slid into the water.

Then that matter of the tenants must be looked into: he did not at present know what lease they held: a short one, he hoped, but if not it might be possible to get a clever lawyer to find a hole somewhere in it. Lawyers were all rascals, that was why you paid them so high: the convenient fellows did dirty work for a clean man.

He took a turn at the cross-word puzzle: the glimpse he had got at Mrs. Oxney's paper supplied some useful clues, and before the dressing bell sounded he had finished with it, and sat down in front of his fire to think over the new life that was soon to open for him. He could not imagine why he had delayed to get married for so long, for, now that he was absolutely face to face with it, matrimony presented great attractions. Comfortable as he was at Wentworth, really remarkably comfortable, a home of his own would suit him better, especially such a home as was waiting for him. He had debated at one time whether he should not give Mrs. Oxney the opportunity of providing one for him, but pleasant though that might be, he had never steadily regarded that prospect, and had shied away from matrimony in vague apprehension that it would entail loss of liberty and alarming obligations. But on approaching it now in a businesslike manner, these terrors quite faded: he saw that instead of being bound to take care of a wife, it was her duty to take care of him. The idea of marrying a girl who had romantic notions and expected ecstasies of conjugal tenderness would have been a positive nightmare, but this was quite a different business. He felt himself indeed in luck, and Miss Howard was in luck

too. To capture a fine, upstanding, honourable man like himself, with no blot on his scutcheon but several medals on his coat and a comfortable competence was more than any woman could expect at her age. She need be under no apprehension of frailties and infidelities on his part, which so often wrecked matrimony, nor need he, for they were both well past the skittish age.

With the closing of the Green Salon and the dispatch of the purchased pictures to their owners, Miss Howard was now at liberty to paint more, or do anything else that presented itself as an agreeable pastime. She had still to settle what disposition to make of those that remained unsold: of these there were some twenty-five. Christmas presents would absorb some, her bedroom walls would absorb more, or Florence would ecstatically absorb them all. But next morning was warm and tranquil, and instead of tackling the heap of frames that were piled up in her bedroom, she decided to get hand and eye in touch again (for she had not taken up a paint brush at all for a fortnight) and from the felled tree on the colonel's golf links, of which a substantial trunk still remained, to make a little picture of Wentworth which, under the title of "Home Sweet Home," she would present to Mrs. Oxney as a reward for having bought Pussy-dear. But though this kind scheme was sufficient excuse for her spending the morning in so wonted a manner, it was not the reason for it: the reason she had talked over with Florence, and they had settled that the colonel was ripe.

They were right about that, for he came down to

breakfast, strung up and resolute, and had dreamed he dwelt in marble halls. Alice had moved over to Florence's table after Mr. Kemp's departure and when he appeared they were both demurely eating eggs. He ignored Kemp but asked Alice what she was going to do on this lovely morning which was quite like spring. She thought she would do a sketch of the house from the links, and he figured her sitting there with Kemp holding her hand or her brushes. For his part, he was going to have a spin on his bicycle: wouldn't she join him? Regretfully she wouldn't: she was going to be very industrious.

The girls finished their breakfast first, and as they went out with waists and arms entwined, Alice certainly gave him a little sweet smile. Not a great joyous grimace, like Mrs. Bliss; that would have meant nothing, but something sweet with a quiver at the corner of her mouth and a quick glance, which seemed highly propitious. When he had finished his breakfast he found the lounge empty and the smoking room empty and the drawing room empty and supposed that they had gone out together. He damned Kemp and sat down to look through the illustrated *Morning Standard,* which he had been taking in lately. After that he would start for a stupendous pedalling and bring home fresh laurels: Miss Howard reverenced these records. He felt quite up to proposing to her this minute, but he made sure that Kemp was with her. There were advertisements in the paper showing entrancing young ladies in corsets and knickerbockers and of fine stalwart men in plus-fours.

He thought the plus-fours would suit him, and imagined seeing his wife in just such an elegant corset.

Along the landing upstairs came familiar warbling noises and tripping feet. He scarcely looked up from his paper because he felt so certain that he would see the ubiquitous Kemp following Alice with her painting satchel. Instead, there was Alice alone, carrying the implements of her craft herself. Alone—was it with a heightened colour that she perceived him?—she went out of the front door, and of Kemp there was no sign. He stole to the window and observed her figure—really a very neat figure for her age—flitting in and out of the shadows of the trees in the garden. She went out of the gate into the golf field, and an obstructing shrub hid her further progress. She had said she was going to sketch there.

Mrs. Oxney, who had been very late that morning, came out of the dining room.

"What a lovely morning you've got for your bicycle ride, Colonel," she said. "Like April, isn't it? I remember your saying that we often got April mornings in November, and November nights in April. So true. Will you be taking your lunch with you? A sandwich or two of that capital cold turkey now."

"No, I sha'n't be out for lunch," said he. "Just a good spin and home again."

"And a fresh record, please, or I shall be sadly disappointed," said Mrs. Oxney, going through to her sitting room.

This sitting room looked out the same way as the

lounge: they both looked out onto the golf links. Mrs. Oxney was fond of birds, and as she stood for a moment in the pale but genial sunshine that poured in at the window, before ordering the bus that was to take Mr. Bullingdon to the station, she thought she saw a green woodpecker fussing about on the green near one of the holes. It proved to be only a starling which was less interesting, but the same glance showed her specks of Miss Howard, through the edge of the shrub that had hid her movements from the colonel in the lounge, seated on the trunk of the felled tree. She was facing the house and was evidently going to sketch.

She heard the front door bang (that would be the colonel going out) and waited a moment more for the pleasure of seeing him set forth on his bicycle. Such vigour, such legs, such a mastery of the vehicle. There he was, but not on his bicycle, whirling down the drive, but crossing it in the direction of the garden and the golf field. But he had not got his golf sticks with him: he was not meaning to play golf instead of going for his ride. Then in a flash the solution struck her.

"I believe he's going to do it," she said to herself.

But though a woman, she was still a housekeeper, and she hurried to the bell and ordered the bus to come round at 10.45 sharp for the London train. When she returned to the window Colonel Chase had vanished behind that tiresome shrub and she wished she had had it cut down. But specks of him then appeared at its edge, and they ranged themselves by those of Miss Howard, and Mrs. Oxney felt certain what his business was. Flor-

ence in her bedroom directly overhead knew it too, and she had the advantage of being able to see over the tiresome shrub.

Miss Howard, seated on her tree trunk, of course saw his approach, but quite unaware of it, measured the height of a Wentworth chimney against her pencil. When his advancing presence was too large to disregard she looked up brightly.

"Not gone for your ride, Colonel?" she asked. "I call that lazy. Not like you."

A suitor's knees, he reflected, ought to tremble. His knees did not: they were as firm as oak posts.

"No one can accuse you of laziness," said he. "Doing one of your charming sketches, I see. A sketch of Wentworth is it? Dear old Wentworth. Ha! Dreams of happiness I've had here."

That was an excellent gambit: an improvisation worthy of Miss Howard.

"Oh, how pleasant," she said. "Tell me about them."

Any suitor would have considered that promising: it sounded like an invitation, like an assured welcome. She appeared quite calm, too, though surely she must have known that, as he had abandoned his bicycle ride and had come to the golf field without his clubs, he must have had some special and unusual mission. He thought it would have been more like a lady of true delicacy and refined instincts to have bent her head over her drawing, unable to check the trembling of her fingers, but her hand was as steady as his knees. Or could it be that she had no idea that she was presently to promise to be his

wife? Or did she guess his mind more subtly yet, and know that in the approaching alliance regard and respect were to fill the place of tumultuous passion? In any case she went on drawing the cowl of the chimney with calm precision.

This direct invitation to tell her about his happy dreams encouraged him to sit down on the trunk beside her. Perhaps it was better, in case she was still unaware of her destiny, to make a few more remarks that would lead up to the revelation.

"Somehow I don't seem to have had the opportunity of getting any quiet talks with you of late," he said. "Your friend Miss Kemp——"

"Sweet Florence!" said Miss Howard very unexpectedly. "She never knows when she's not wanted, does she? Such a dear, and such a crashing bore."

That was splendid: he felt they understood each other.

"I've found her so," he said. "I've often wished she was at Bournemouth. Or I should have if I had not thought she was a friend of yours whose presence always gave you pleasure."

Miss Howard held up her sketch at arm's length, and looked at the chimney; she had got it much too large. She looked at Wentworth, and saw the crashing bore at her bedroom window, peeping out from a half-drawn curtain.

"Tell me about your happy dreams, Colonel Chase," she said.

The moment had come. There could not be a better

opportunity, nor one more obviously meant for him. He cleared his throat.

"Happy dreams about my future," he said. "I'm getting to be a lonely man, Miss Howard, and though I'm not old yet, the years are passing. I want a companion, a dear companion with whom I can share my joys and my sorrows. One who will make me happy, and whom, I trust, I shall make happy. I shall do my best. I've long wanted to tell you this, and ask you, in fact I do so now, to be that companion. Will you marry me, Miss Howard?"

"Certainly not," said Miss Howard.

He jumped to his feet as if he had been pinched, and now he found his knees were trembling. He could hardly believe what he had heard, but there seemed no doubt as to what she had said.

"You don't mean that?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," said Miss Howard.

The little place in Kent seemed to explode into a million fragments with Colonel Chase among them: he fell giddily through the air and found himself again in the golf field at Wentworth where Miss Howard, seated on a tree trunk, was just opening her paint box. As the incredible truth branded itself on his brain he found that, next to his disappointment, his keenest emotion was the desire that nobody should know of his awful, his astounding humiliation.

"I hope you will regard my proposal of marriage to you," he said, "as absolutely private. I made it out of my regard for you, and of affection——"

Miss Howard put down her paint box in a great hurry: her hand was trembling now much as Colonel Chase's knees.

"That's the finishing touch," she said. "Are you ashamed of having wanted to marry me? Oh, Colonel Chase, you cut a very poor figure."

Three seconds later Mrs. Oxney, from her sitting-room window to which she had been glued, saw the colonel reappearing on the left of the tiresome shrub, and her first mental ejaculation was, "Well, he has been quick." Then, as he completely emerged, she saw he was alone, and it looked as if Miss Howard had been quick. "I do believe she's gone and refused him," was her second ejaculation. "Well, I never! What will he be like?"

As he came closer she fled from the window and busied herself in household affairs, for she had seen enough to know what he would be like. His foot crunched the gravel, and she heard the front door bang. There came the sound of an electric bell ringing, and after a pause in which no parlour maid, though winged like Mercury, could have answered it, a repeated and a longer summons. At the third peal she reënforced her courage with her curiosity and went out into the lounge to see what he wanted.

His hand was still on the bell push.

"My sandwiches, Mrs. Oxney," he roared at her. "It's half-past ten, and there's no sign of my sandwiches. Everything is disgracefully late this morning. Wentworth isn't what it used to be."

"But you told me you wouldn't take your lunch out, Colonel," she faltered. "I'll get it ready for you in a jiffy: turkey. But you did tell me——"

"And am I not allowed to change my mind if I choose?" he interrupted. Off she flew to the kitchen, colliding with a parlour maid who was running to answer the bell, for only Colonel Chase ever rang like that, and when the Colonel rang like that, O Lor'.

Mrs. Oxney sliced off the choicest morsels of turkey, the cook cut the most delicate slices of bread, the kitchen maid tore the heart out of a lettuce, the scullery maid polished up an apple, and in an incredibly short space of time Mrs. Oxney was hurrying back with a pile of these propitiating offerings, neatly tied up. She could not, being a woman, help glancing at his furious face with eager sympathy as he stowed them into his pockets, and the awful conviction came over him that it mattered very little whether Miss Howard behaved like a woman of honour or not, since nothing could be more evident than that Mrs. Oxney, by some infernal feminine instinct, knew all about it. He scowled back at her sympathetic silence, and she saw him from the window recklessly careering down the drive.

"Well, he is taking it like a man," she thought, and went to tell her sister.

It was impossible not to be thrilled, but it was difficult not to be a little anxious about the social atmosphere when Colonel Chase returned. The company of paying guests at Wentworth was now diminished, and

out of the four left in the house one was a rejected swain, the second a rejecting mistress, and the third the mistress's bosom friend.

Wentworth prided itself on its harmonious existence for, given that the colonel was in good temper, they were all, as Mrs. Oxney often said, more like a happy family party than a collection of promiscuous guests. But it was stretching optimism to bursting point to suppose that he could possibly be in a good temper, and the prospect of a happy family party that evening was indeed small.

Mrs. Bertram (though thrilled) shook her head sadly over the outlook.

"I could almost wish the colonel would catch one of his worst colds," she said, "such as would keep him in his room till Miss Howard and Miss Kemp leave us, but that's not till the day after to-morrow. Yet I'm afraid there's little chance of that on such a mild day. I can see she's sketching still, and Miss Kemp with her. I didn't see the colonel after his disappointment. Was he much cut up, Margaret?"

"More as if he'd like to cut somebody else up, and I'm sure I don't wonder," said Mrs. Oxney. "The colonel refused! It hardly bears thinking of. An awful tantrum, I should call it. Such a ringing of bells, and such scowls at me, when I brought him ever so tasty a lunch."

"More angry than lovesick then?" asked Mrs. Bertram.

"I never thought he was lovesick, Amy," said Mrs.

Oxney. "But when he expected a happy future in store for him in that beautiful place of Miss Howard's, it must have been a slap in the face. Enough to make any man in a tantrum, if he'd counted on it. And such a pleasant arrangement for them both! I'm sorry."

"And then at dinner to-night," said Mrs. Bertram. "Very awkward for Miss Howard sitting just opposite the man she's refused. Luckily you can always count on her behaving like a perfect lady. I only hope that she and Miss Kemp won't sit and whisper and giggle in a corner as they do sometimes, for the colonel's sure to think they're whispering about him and that'll make him mad. I declare I shall be glad to see the two ladies' backs when they leave us, and never yet have I been glad when a guest has gone from Wentworth."

An afterthought slowly struck her.

"And yet we don't know that the colonel has proposed to Miss Howard," she said, "or that she's refused him. You only saw him go out into the golf field and come back quick and alone in a tantrum."

Such a suggestion was not, of course, worth answering.

Meanwhile the bright nickel-plated bicycle had been flashing along up hill and down dale with a speed unequalled in the establishment of any previous record, and its rider's state of mind may be faintly indicated by the fact that he had forgotten to set the pedometer back at zero. Rage and humiliation spurred him on, and it was not till he had left familiar country far behind, and his ankles ached with pedalling, that he dismounted,

and, sitting on a convenient gate, that he attempted coherently to review the repulsive situation. Lovesick he certainly was not; in a tantrum, yes. He had paid Miss Howard the highest compliment a respectable man can pay a respectable woman, and in refusing to take him she had not expressed the smallest regret: it was idle to suppose that she felt any. And then there was The Croft: in losing Miss Howard he had lost The Croft, and all the leisurely dignity of his imagined life there. He had vividly seen himself installed there, looking after his wife's agreeable property, and he could scarcely yet believe that there was no more chance of his becoming Squire Chase of The Croft than there was of his being Archbishop of Canterbury. More than that, he had decided that matrimony in the abstract was preferable to bachelor life in the concrete, and now nobody, as far as he knew, was going to marry him at all. More than that, there was the return to Wentworth facing him; and just now he would almost sooner have faced the man-eater again. Wentworth, he unerringly divined, had been expecting him to honour Miss Howard, and in spite of his request to her that she should not mention her disdain of the honour, he already gathered that Mrs. Oxney knew. If Mrs. Oxney knew, Mrs. Bertram would know, and as Miss Howard certainly knew, Kemp would know. He might just as well not have asked her to keep silence on this painful subject, and have been spared the information that he cut a very poor figure. Thinking it over he was afraid he saw what she meant, and, unaccus-

tomed as he was to find fault with himself, it was rather a pity to have said that. . . .

He ate his lunch, and unable to go further, turned his bicycle homewards. Anyhow he would show Wentworth how gallant gentlemen behave in heart-breaking situations.

CHAPTER X

In spite of this manly resolution Mrs. Bertram's gloomy forebodings were fulfilled, and the evening was ghastly in the extreme. Colonel Chase was rather late for dinner (unlike him) but his soup was being kept warm, and he marched into the dining room with the evening paper under his arm and a fund of unnaturally cheerful observations. He could not notice Miss Howard, for that would have rendered magnanimity ridiculous, but never had he been otherwise so affable.

"Ha, Mrs. Holders," he said, "I crave your partnership at the bridge table after dinner. Mrs. Oxney and Mrs. Bertram? Yes? How you spoil me! I shall hope to wipe off the memory of the adverse fate——"

From that moment everything went wrong. The news of his "adverse fate" with Miss Howard that morning instantly occurred to everybody and there was a general exchange of stealthy glances, and a feeling of great uncomfortableness before the colonel could indicate that he only alluded to the adverse fate which lost him one and ninepence last night.

"And there looks to be a good cross-word puzzle this evening," he said to Mrs. Oxney. "I took a glance at it and I think that we shall find a worse crux than 'crofters.' "

This time he paused: he felt he must really take care of such pitfalls. Mrs. Oxney gallantly plunged into the silence.

"And you had a good ride, I hope, Colonel," she said, skilfully changing the subject. "Where did you go?"

"Out beyond Denton: a considerable way beyond Denton."

"Well, I do call that wonderful. And you starting so much later than usual."

Mrs. Bertram trod heavily on her sister's foot under the table, to remind her what was the cause of this late start, and Mrs. Oxney's voice ceased as if the telephone exchange had cut her off. She gave a thin faint cry of dismay at what she had said and pain at what her sister had done, and Mrs. Bertram tried her hand at tactful conversation.

"It grows a little chilly," she said, "and we'd better have our game of bridge snugly in the smoking room. There's a beautiful fire of logs there: that trunk of the tree in the golf field had some sound wood in it——"

So Mrs. Oxney trod on her foot, and again there was silence. It was broken by Florence giving a sudden shriek of laughter for no apparent reason. So Miss Howard tried to explain that by implying that she had said something very droll.

"I thought that would amuse you, dear," she said. "I saved that up to tell you. I was wondering, do you know, as I sketched this morning . . ."

Everybody joined in to cover up *that*. Mrs. Oxney called across to Mrs. Holders to know if she liked sea kale cooked like this, and Florence put some eager question to Mrs. Bertram on the subject of Pekingese dogs. Then it was seen that such pairings of conversationalists would never do, for they left Colonel Chase and Miss Howard sitting as dumb as sphinxes. In this diminished company all the occupied tables had been moved up near the fire for warmth and intimacy, and Mrs. Oxney wished she had scattered them to the remotest corners of the room instead. Nervousness gripped them all, for it seemed as if every topic of normal conversation had a live bomb entangled in its innocent meshes, and no one knew exactly in what trivial subject it might not lurk. Even the parlour maids were becoming jumpy and losing their deft precision, and presently the hapless Mabel who served the colonel let a perfect avalanche of walnuts fall onto his lap and the tablecloth and his plate and into his finger-bowl. The appalling explosion of wrath that followed drowned the rattlings and splashings of the nuts.

Mrs. Oxney hoped that when they settled down to bridge this awful effort to behave naturally would be less of a strain. But Colonel Chase's resolve to behave like a gallant gentleman produced the most embarrassing effect, for instead of hectoring and instructing and swanking as usual he was polite and courtly and altogether unreal. Decorous silence reigned, since conversation was so dangerous, interspersed with little

compliments between partners on each other's sound declaration and skilful play and bad luck. Mrs. Oxney made a few attempts to be natural: she told her sister that she ought to have taken out trumps, and appealed to Colonel Chase to know whether that would not have been the correct course, but instead of lecturing about it, and repeating that he was famous throughout India for the observance of this excellent principle, he only said, "I have no doubt you are right," which made Mrs. Holders look more surprised than she had ever been. They all knew, too, that Miss Howard and Miss Kemp were together in the drawing room, from which there proceeded occasional bursts of laughter which sounded very merry, and it was impossible not to conjecture what caused them. It could only be one subject, and who could pretend to be interested in bridge while the exact details of what had occurred that morning were probably being humorously discussed? Certainly Mrs. Oxney could not. At half-past ten precisely Colonel Chase revoked, and instead of blaming Mrs. Holders for not having asked him if he had any more clubs, he apologized. This finished the rubber: he paid, said good-night to the stupefied company, and went upstairs.

Tongues were loosed, for the strain was over. All three ladies talked simultaneously, and when the first torrent was spent they agreed that they had never seen a man so changed.

"Greatly improved," said Mrs. Holders serenely. "It would do him good to be refused every day."

"Oh, Mrs. Holders, how unkind!" said Mrs. Oxney.

"Just think how affable he'd have been if Miss Howard had accepted him."

"Affable? Intolerable!" said Mrs. Holders. "But I doubt if the improvement's real. Did you hear him when the nuts were spilled?"

"Yes, he seemed more natural then," said Mrs. Bertram. "But what a difficult thing it's been to avoid dangerous ground. I shall go to bed, for it's tired me out."

They were all tired out.

Florence was the first to come down next morning. Papers and letters had arrived and by her place was the *Morning Standard,* which Colonel Chase also took in, a chatty sheet with many pictures and thrilling stories of how a marchioness had swallowed a thimble, and a child had rescued a Newfoundland dog from a watery grave, and a golfer had taken a hole of prodigious length in one stroke which was an eagle or a dodo or some picturesque fowl. Alice took in the *Times,* so also did Mrs. Oxney, though she never read it, and Mrs. Holders had no paper at all.

Just as Florence sat down she saw a telegraph boy ride past the window on a red bicycle. She wondered if the telegram was for her, but when a couple of minutes had passed without its being brought her, she came to the very shrewd conclusion that it must be for somebody else. With a pleased anticipation of attractive little titbits, she opened her paper. And then she opened her eyes and her mouth as well in horrified amazement.

Though the letters seemed to dance before her eyes, she read:

FIRE AT TUNBRIDGE WELLS

A fire, happily unattended with loss of life, broke out about midnight at a semidetached villa called The Croft in the Station Road at Tunbridge Wells. The house was tenanted by Mr. Algernon Gradge and his sister, who with their two servants had a narrow escape. The flames mounted so quickly that they could not descend the only staircase, and had to get through a trapdoor in the roof, and thus made their way into the adjoining house. The Croft itself was entirely burned out with all its contents, and a mere shell of the outer walls remains.

For a moment, so wildly dissimilar was The Croft of this paragraph from the ancestral home of the Howards, Florence thought how odd it was that there should be two Crofts at Tunbridge Wells, tenanted by four Gradges, but instantly she swept the notion aside as puerile. Then all that was finest and most loyal in her nature rallied from the shock, and thanking God that she was the earliest breakfaster and alone in the dining room, she scudded across to Colonel Chase's table, plucked from it his copy of the *Morning Standard,* folded it up and sat on it. Hardly had she effected this noble larceny when the door opened and he came in. Florence felt faint at the thought of what would have happened if he had been half a minute earlier, or if she had not pulled her wits together so quickly. That he should know that The Croft was a semidetached villa was so appalling a thought that she felt as if her hair had turned gray. Even as it was she might not have averted the catastrophe, for there might be some men-

tion of the fire in the *Times*. She opened Alice's copy and skimmed the pages; to her unutterable relief there was no record of it.

"Mabel!" said Colonel Chase in an awful voice. "The papers have come in, haven't they? Why isn't my *Morning Standard* here?"

Mabel couldn't say. It was not her job to distribute the papers.

"Then get me another copy," said the colonel.

Florence's heart sank like lead in an unplumbed sea. It rose again like a balloon when Mabel came back to say that the paper boy had gone. All might yet be saved.

"Pshaw!" said Colonel Chase, whose gallantry seemed to have evaporated during the night. "Boiled egg and bacon, not cut in cubes, but in slices."

"Beg your pardon, sir?" said Mabel.

"Thin," said Colonel Chase.

Mabel hurried out and Alice hurried in. She held a telegram in her hand, and spread it before Florence.

"The most terrible shock," she began. "All my beautiful——"

"Hush," said Florence in a low voice. "I know all about it. There was a paragraph in the *Morning Standard*. Station Road: semidetached villa."

She sank her voice lower yet.

"He doesn't know," she said. "I was down first. As soon as I saw it I stole his *Morning Standard*. A narrow squeak. I'm sitting on it."

The immense relief of that took precedence of everything else in Alice's mind.

"You angel!" she said.

"I know. It was smart of me. Now we can't talk here, so finish your breakfast quickly and join me."

By a marvellous piece of legerdemain Florence managed, with much rustling, to fold the stolen copy of the *Morning Standard* inside Alice's *Times,* and having appointed her own bedroom as a rendezvous where they would be certainly safe from Colonel Chase, she left Alice to follow her. Alice had acknowledged the identity of the ancestral home with a semidetached villa in the Station Road and Florence felt rather puzzled.

Alice lingered rather than hurried over her breakfast, for a little quiet meditation would not be amiss before she talked things over with Florence. The more she considered her loss, the less shocking did it appear, for the family seat was an odious little house, when shorn of the trailing clouds of glory with which she had decked it, and it was fully insured. She had been anxious also about the disclosure she would have to make to Florence before her projected pilgrimage to visit the shrine; it would have been an unpleasant job, but this convenient conflagration had removed the necessity of telling Florence, for now Florence knew. It was as if she had been dreading the extraction of a tooth, and now awoke (as from an anæsthetic) to find that the agony was over without her having perceived it: the family seat which had been causing her pangs was gone. Exactly how Florence would take the loss was another question, but she had no very grave apprehensions about that, for Florence had herself suggested that she should tell the col-

onel all sorts of lies about the little place, and after that these greater splendours which she knew to be false would eclipse such lesser glories as she might believe to be true. There was therefore not more than a shade of nervousness about her tripping step or her warblings as she went upstairs to Florence's bedroom.

The moment she opened the door her friend began to speak: she had been thinking things over too.

"The evening paper is the next danger," she said, "but I dare say there'll be nothing about it. Only a semi-detached villa, you see, and no lives lost, and even if there had been, it would only have been Gradges. Oh, darling, I'm so glad that The Croft wasn't what I thought it."

Alice did not much like that last remark: Florence was not as muddled up as she hoped. She pressed her hand to her forehead.

"I feel so confused!" she said. "It was only two days ago that you insisted on punishing Colonel Chase—that was what you called it—by making me tell all sorts of fibs about The Croft. But you knew they were fibs."

"Oh, but what I meant was before that," said Florence. "What makes me so glad was that it wasn't a big place as—as I thought it, with rose gardens and a park and peaches."

"But I don't understand," said Alice. "I never mentioned a park or peaches till you insisted on my doing so, in order to encourage Colonel Chase and then make him wither over what he had lost."

Florence did not understand either.

"But the lawn," she said, "and your gardeners, and all those other beautiful things."

"There was a lawn," said Alice, "not large, I never said large, but a lawn."

"And the greenhouses——" said Florence.

"You made me invent the greenhouses," said Alice, "and the box hedge. That was two nights ago."

"But the general sense," said Florence. "Ask Mrs. Oxney what she thought The Croft was like. And you said it would hurt you to go down there with me. A semidetached villa wouldn't hurt anybody."

There was a dreadful truth in that which it was impossible to combat. But all the wise men in the world in consultation with all the wise women in the world could not have suggested a sounder manœuvre than that which Alice instantly executed. She burst into tears.

"You are very cruel," she sobbed. "To please you, I invented a lot of lies, and now you tell me I'm a liar. Whose fault is it that I am?"

"No, but before that, before that," repeated Florence.

"Before or after makes little difference," said Alice continuing to sob, "if that's what you think of me. If you feel like that, I can't imagine why you took away Colonel Chase's *Morning Standard*. I can't think why you didn't show it him and laugh over it together. If you believe I've been telling you lies, it's your duty to expose me. Tell Mrs. Oxney, tell Mrs. Holders, and particularly tell Colonel Chase."

Reason and affection battled together in Florence's

rather male mind. She knew she was right and she knew that Alice knew she was right. It was not just that she should have to give up her point. Meantime the friend of her heart, the brilliant, the accomplished Alice, was sobbing.

"Darling, don't suggest such absurd things," she said. "Don't you see that my whole object is to keep this secret? I should hate anybody to know what The Croft was really like. But how—oh, what is there to cry about? —how could I have got the idea that it was an old country house with lovely gardens except from you? Nobody else ever told me about it or—or I should have known what it really was."

Alice took not the smallest notice of this admirable logic. She continued sobbing and sticking to her point.

"And now just because you've got a wrong idea about it owing to what you yourself insisted I should tell Colonel Chase, you say I've been deceiving you. First my house is burned down and all my things, and on top of that the only person in the world who I thought trusted and loved me turns against me."

This was heart breaking.

"But I don't turn against you," said the agonized Florence. "And I do love you."

Alice held out the copy of the *Morning Standard* in the hand that was not engaged with her handkerchief.

"Please take it to Colonel Chase," she said. "I think it's your duty."

"It isn't my duty, and if it was I shouldn't do it," cried Florence.

Alice made a master stroke, quite improvised.

"Then I shall," she said. "I shall say my best friend tells me I have been deceiving him. I shall not dream of saying that you suggested it. I shall take the whole blame."

"But you can't," said Florence, bouncing to the door, and standing in front of it. "Besides I am responsible for all the worst things. Telling anybody is the one thing out of the question. I couldn't bear anybody knowing. You shan't go! Oh, do sit down, darling, and let me think a minute."

Alice sat down again and with tear-dimmed eyes gazed out of the window over the golf field, while Florence's heart made furious attacks on her brain. She thought over the larger splendour of The Croft, the shrubbery of flowering rarities, the sweet rose garden, the fountain where naughty Alice had bathed, the greenhouses of muscat grapes, the stables, the pheasant shooting (no, not the pheasant shooting: Alice had distinctly stated that there was no pheasant shooting) and all these, it was true, had been inventions made at her instigation. Indoors there was the library and the cedarwood parquet, and the gallery room, and at the bank the Chelsea figures and the Queen Anne silver, and all these, too, had sprung into being at her behest. She began to wonder on what her earlier impressions (though still distinct) of The Croft were based, she tried to recollect a single definite statement of Alice's made previously, she began to grow confused and vague. Had all the splendour which she knew to be inventions stained her

previous memories and rendered them more highly coloured? She knew that it was not so, but now her heart had got a strangle hold on her mind, and was forcing it to make admissions under torture, for there was Alice, whom she adored, blowing her nose and wiping her eyes and being miserable. Every now and then her reason gasped out to her, "But Alice *did* lie about The Croft. Ask Mrs. Oxney," but these rational gaspings were growing fainter, as her pain at Alice's distress grew stronger, and the need for her affection more insistent. Florence believed that Alice, too, was fond of her, and it was wretched for her to lose her house and her friend before lunch time. And she herself could not face the loss of Alice.

"Perhaps I'm altogether wrong," she said. "Perhaps it was only the inventions which I insisted on that made me think you had said the same sort of things before, only less so, about The Croft."

"Far better ask Mrs. Oxney, if you're not sure about it," said Alice, repeating the master stroke, "or best of all ask Colonel Chase. Tell him all about it."

"How could I do anything of the kind?" asked Florence. "How can you think me so disloyal?"

"It isn't very loyal to think those things of me at all," said Alice.

Florence's heart gave a crow of triumph, for her reason gave one convulsive struggle and expired.

"I must have been entirely mistaken," she said. "Oh, how dreadful of me! And I've hurt you: that's worst of all."

"A little," said Alice huskily. "Not much. It doesn't matter."

"But it does matter. It matters terribly. Oh, do forgive me."

The reconciliation, though now certain, was not fully accomplished. Florence, in contrition, had to abase herself further and Alice to concede that perhaps, unthinkingly, she had said things about The Croft which might lead imaginative minds to think that it was something of larger scale than a semidetached villa in the Station Road. She could not think what they were, but there might have been something . . . Then they turned with kisses and caresses to consider the dangers and exposures that still threatened.

"There's nothing in the *Times*," said Florence, "and I don't think it is likely to have anything to-morrow."

"But there's the evening paper, that *Evening Gazette* which the colonel takes in," said Alice. "It has columns of little paragraphs."

"That's true. But he's usually out when it comes and I will lie in wait and glance through it."

"And if there is?" asked Alice.

"Steal it, darling," said Florence, "like his morning paper."

"How brave you are! But won't he think it odd if both his papers go wrong to-day?"

"I shouldn't wonder if he did," said Florence. "But he would think it odder if he saw about The Croft. And after to-day there won't really be any risk, and to-

morrow we go. Oh, what a lovely time we shall have in London now that we're at one again!"

"You dear!" said Alice. "By the way, The Croft is fully insured. And what shall we do now? Sha'n't we go out?"

"Let's! And may I come and sit with you in the golf field while you finish your sketch? I shall sit just where the colonel sat and make love to you."

Alice pressed her hand.

"And when my sketch is finished," she said, "it shall be yours. I thought of calling it Home Sweet Home, and giving it to Mrs. Oxney. But now it shall be Blessings on the Falling Out. No one will understand that but you and I."

They went out together in a stiff gale of renewed tenderness, with linked skippings and gambollings, Florence carrying the satchel with the painting utensils for the Falling Out, and Alice gaily warbling. Careful though they had been in providing against future perils by the plot of stealing Colonel Chase's evening paper, they forgot, like most criminals, the most obvious precaution of destroying the two copies of the incriminating *Morning Standard*. The consequences might have been dire, for Mabel, hurrying in with duster and slop pail to "do" Florence's room, found them there, and bethought herself to take one to the Colonel. Then, luckily, she remembered how obviously disagreeable he had been about the cataracts of walnuts last night, and decided not to gratify him. Instead she took them away and tossed

them onto the store of paper used for kindling in the kitchen cupboard. There for the present they lay innocuous, but like mines charged with deadly matter, they needed only a touch of blundering circumstances to cause a devastating explosion.

The thieves spent a tuneful, artistic, and affectionate morning. Now that the catastrophe had happened, Alice felt greatly relieved, for all anxiety over Florence's discovering the truth about The Croft was over, and so well and pathetically had she managed that the crisis had only drawn them closer together. The sketch promised to be one of the artist's most successful pieces, and the paint brush dipped with sentiment, for the window of Florence's room, where the endearing falling out had occurred, was visible above the shrub, and Alice attempted to portray her figure standing there. But her face would not look otherwise than the globe of a lamp, and so she drew a blue curtain over it, and obstinate Flo was now behind the blue curtain just as she had been yesterday morning when Colonel Chase made his declaration. Then there were plans to be made for the future: the fortnight in London became a firm month, after which Florence must spend Christmas with her father, and Alice would go to Torquay for sea air and marine subjects.

"You must join me there for a bit," said she. "Red sandstone cliffs, the blue, blue sea. Anstey's Cove. Such lovely serpentine rocks."

Florence did not reply for a moment, and Alice having made a blue, blue curtain, nudged her.

"Won't you?" she said.

Florence drew a long breath. She felt her moment had come.

"Yes, of course I will," she said, "but those are only little temporary plans. I want a permanent one. Mayn't we make a permanent plan, darling? I mean, won't you come to live with me altogether in London? The flat's mine, Mamma left it me, and I believe we should be so happy. Don't say 'Certainly not,' as you said yesterday to that absurd man. I would do all the housekeeping, or if it amused you, you should. I think you'd like it better than Wentworth, and as for me, bliss. You shall subscribe to expenses or not just as you like. And Papa won't want me again, for Nurse Babbit exactly suits him. I shall be quite alone otherwise, but that mustn't influence you: I don't appeal to you, though I should be miserable without you."

The sketch, with Florence supposedly behind the blue curtain, slipped unregarded from Alice's hand, for Florence had come out from behind all curtains.

"Oh, Florence, are you sure?" she asked.

"Positive," said Florence.

"So am I then," said Alice.

The moment had grown quite solemn. They looked at each other in silence, they gravely kissed. Then Alice said:

"I told a heap of lies about that villa. I made it out to be grand and it was a horrible little place, and the shunting at the station used to keep us awake. The rent was fifty pounds a year."

Florence appreciated that at its full value.

"Oh, I am glad you've told me," she said hurriedly, "and now it's quite over. Darling, just think: yesterday the colonel sat just where I'm sitting, when you said 'Certainly not,' and now, bless you, you say 'Certainly so.' I long to tell him you're going to live with me instead of him. How he would hate me! Delicious? But then you'll have to tell Mrs. Oxney that you're not coming back here, so it will get round."

The two went off next day on their honeymoon, but as their rooms were to be filled up at once, Mrs. Oxney resigned herself to their departure. She felt, too, that the colonel would never settle down to his old ways while the constant reminder of his disappointment was there. Indeed the news that Wentworth would never again ring with Miss Howard's bright little snatches of song was compensated for by the consideration that Colonel Chase would very likely have gone away if she had stopped, and of the two she vastly preferred him. A man, and such a fine big man, was a much more valuable social nucleus in the house, for in his robust hectoring way he kept things up to the mark, and told his grim or amusing stories, and laid down the law at bridge, and made it seem an honour to play with him. Of course he lost his temper, and had tantrums, but then he recovered it again and made a fresh record on his bicycle. He was an asset, a distinction: a colonel was better than a plain Miss to rally round. She quite made up her mind to put in the extra bathroom when he went away for a fort-

night at Christmas. It would be ready for his return, and that would be a nice surprise for him.

Colonel Chase made a remarkable recovery after Miss Howard's departure, and in the week or two that remained before his Christmas holiday, so well earned by his busy life at Wentworth, he established himself with the new paying guests, elderly and hobbling ladies, as an athlete and an authority on most subjects. There was some very pleasant bridge the night before he left but he broke the table up at ten o'clock, as he was off quite early in the morning and had yet his packing to do.

"I never trust anybody to do my packing for me," he said, "and if I had fifty valets I would still do it. In India, whatever the thermometer stood at, I invariably packed for myself. Give me plenty of paper to wrap my kit up in, and there'll be no shaking about or breakages."

"Nobody can pack like you, Colonel," said Mrs. Oxney. "I always used to pride myself on my packing, till once I saw you doing it. Like a mosaic: everything fitting so that there wasn't a chink anywhere. And the amount you get in, astonishing!"

Colonel Chase's bed was piled high with his clothes and other effects, waiting for his mosaic touch, but he had made very little progress in his astonishing art when he saw that there was not nearly enough paper. Up came Mabel in answer to his summons, and down went Mabel, and up she came again with a pile of newspapers.

"Thankye," said Colonel Chase, feeling in his pocket for some small change as Christmas was approaching.

Three of the larger coins would be a generous tip, but then he remembered the cataract of nuts, and let one of them slip back into his pocket again.

His manual dexterity did not entirely occupy his mind: he could ruminate while he made his mosaic, and as he wrapped up boots and fitted Macaulay's *Essays* among them to keep them tight, he thought over his disappointment. It was still a bitter reflection that owing to a woman's perverseness he could not now look forward to being the master of a fine Queen Anne Manor House with gardens and greenhouses and galleries, for he still felt that he was absolutely cut out to fill that post. Instead the misguided lady had gone off to live in frumpy spinster partnership with one of the most tiresome creatures he had ever come across. Together, perhaps, for he understood that Kemp was well off, they would settle into The Croft, when Miss Howard's tenants came to the end of their lease, and get cheated by the gardeners and never have a peach or a bunch of grapes for their own table. A woman could manage a house (he had fully intended his wife to manage hers) but with an estate like that a man's grasp and authority were required, or everything ran to seed. The country club, the comfortable little parties, the position of Squire Howard-Chase! Well, it was no use thinking about it, and after all Wentworth was very comfortable, and the new-comers seemed reverential women, and he hoped they would stop on.

He picked up one of the papers that had been brought him by Mabel and his eye was arrested by a

remarkable picture of a baboon on the first page, which was unfamiliar to him. Yet the paper was the *Morning Standard* which he saw every day, and he could not imagine how he had forgotten this grimacing ape. He turned the leaf and found another picture he was sure he had not seen before, and at that fateful moment he remembered that some few mornings ago his *Standard* had not arrived. Then his eye fell on a headline: "Fire at Tunbridge Wells," and in the ensuing paragraph on the words "a semidetached villa called The Croft." He gave one loud raucous exclamation, and next moment, without pausing to put on his coat, which he had shed for the mosaic work, he was bounding downstairs, with the pedometer clicking madly in his pocket. The smoking room where they had played bridge was empty; and he hurried to Mrs. Oxney's sitting room and entered without knocking. There she was with her skirt turned back over her knees, warming her shins at the fire and eating seed cake.

"Why, whatever's the matter, Colonel?" she said, hastily putting down her skirt and her seed cake. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Wrong?" he echoed, brandishing the *Morning Standard*. "Listen to this. Fire at Tunbridge Wells, Mrs. Oxney."

"Gracious me, how dangerous. Not—not Miss Howard's beautiful place?" she cried.

"You've guessed! You're right! But there's something you've not guessed. The Croft was burned out, but what do you suppose The Croft was? A semi-

detached villa, Mrs. Oxney, a semidetached villa in the Station Road!"

"It must be another one," said Mrs. Oxney faintly.

"Not a bit of it. Tenants were occupying it: the Gradges. Don't you remember the name? I do. Station Road: semidetached villa. What a liar the woman is with her manor house and her shrubberies and her rose gardens, and her gallery room. Family portraits too: a couple of photographs I expect. I'll tell you what I think: the descendant of the noble house made up all that swaggering nonsense just to entrap me into——"

On second thoughts that wouldn't do, but the colonel continued with no pause at all.

"She wanted to make us all think she was of the landed gentry. Swank! Lies! The painful necessity of letting her beautiful place, but no repining, brave girl, because it's happened to so many of her class. But what's the class, I ask you? The semidetached class. Curates and apothecaries and chimney sweeps. Why my tailor's name is Howard, though I never taxed Miss Howard with that. But to think of the escape I've had! The Croft, a semidetached villa!"

This was a mistake. Mrs. Oxney, horrified as she was (for she had been talking only this evening to some of the new guests, lamenting that Miss Howard, who had that lovely place in Kent, had just gone) could not think so ill of the colonel as to imagine that he had been "after" the exploded and now burned-out Croft, instead of its mistress. Yet his words did lend themselves to such an interpretation.

"Why, you speak as if it was The Croft that had enticed you, Colonel," she said. "To be sure, it does look as if Miss Howard had made it out a bit grander than it was, but surely it was she you wanted. I should hate to believe otherwise of you, though to be sure it was disappointing to think that you'd lost all that beautiful property as well as your young lady."

Colonel Chase thought for the moment that he was in a hole. But his excitement had sharpened his wits to an extraordinary acuteness, and he saw a loophole.

"I repeat that I've had an escape," he said weightily. "When I proposed, as I did, to the lady you designate as young, I thought her an accomplished woman, within limits, not without charm, but above all an honourable and truthful woman. This information, which I stumbled on by accident, shows me that her idea of truth is different from mine, and long may it remain so. That's what I mean by an escape. Sooner or later it would have turned out that she had grossly lied to me about The Croft. I could never have trusted her again and misery would have followed on marriage. And when I think of all I have done for her, the pictures I have bought, the offer of a name which though no doubt obscure is yet honourable: then I repeat, as often as you like, that I have had an escape. Ha!"

Mrs. Oxney pored over the fatal paragraph, sadly clicking her tongue against her teeth.

"It does look as if she had deceived us," she said. "I wouldn't have thought it of her."

"Then I would, Mrs. Oxney," said Colonel Chase. "I

never really trusted her. That improvisation at which she had been practising for days! I could have whistled it before she played it at the entertainment. It's all of a piece."

Mrs. Oxney felt that Miss Howard could not be so black as the colonel was painting her. She had to stand up for her sex.

"But you knew that before you proposed to her," she said. "Besides, where's the harm?"

"I did know it: you are right," said Colonel Chase. "I hoped that those little superficial fibs were no part of her real nature. But now! Instead of the Queen Anne manor house and the grape house and the peach house and the bathing pool——"

"No! Not bathing pool?" asked Mrs. Oxney.

"Bathing pool. She bathed there when a girl—and the shrubberies and ancestralcies, we have a semidetached villa in the Station Road. Ha, ha, ha! Stupendous, I repeat. Enough. Dear me, I am talking to you in my shirt sleeves. Very remiss of me: I hope I have a better idea of what is due to the other sex than Miss Howard has. The peaches and the muscat grapes! If a peach or a grape ever found its way into The Croft, it came from a barrow in the Station Road. We should have had a banana grove next. I wish Miss Howard well and I shall certainly send her a sympathetic note, condoling with her on the loss of her semidetached villa and hoping that its treasures are amply insured."

So happy a mixture of essential spite and apparent magnanimity could hardly be believed, and, hoarse with

rhetoric, Colonel Chase ceased foaming at the mouth and straddling in front of the fireplace and sat down, as calm as the centre of a cyclone. Mrs. Oxney, he supposed, had got used to the informality of his shirt sleeves by now, and if she hadn't she never would.

"Well, I'm sure you're very forgiving, Colonel," she said, "after the way Miss Howard has treated you. I've often noticed how large-minded soldiers are. Mr. Oxney was, though to be sure he was only in the militia. And I quite misunderstood you, I see. I thought at first that you meant that you'd had an escape because The Croft wasn't quite what you thought it, now I see you weren't such a mercenary. Poor Miss Howard, what she's lost when you gave her the chance! It all comes of not being quite truthful."

It occurred to Colonel Chase that Miss Howard's painful untruthfulness had been the cause not of her losing him, but of her having the opportunity to win him, if she had been disposed. But to correct Mrs. Oxney (as they were not playing bridge but having a heart-to-heart talk) would be the act of a pedant, and he let her faulty logic pass. . . . There she sat in her rich evening silk, very sympathetic and very comely, and quite void of deceit. He knew all about her, the solidity of her connection, the excellence of her table, the admirable housekeeping qualities which made Wentworth so comfortable. After this turmoil of emotion these were peaceful thoughts.

"I have been deceived in Miss Howard," he said, "but I dismiss it from my mind and will not suffer it to

sully the respect in which I have always held her sex. My experience of it has been far otherwise and I have no doubt that it will continue to be so."

He was astonished at the perfect phrasing of his magnanimous sentiments: Macaulay's *Essays* could contain nothing more simple and dignified. . . . The clock on the mantelpiece struck, and with scarcely less astonishment he heard it announce midnight.

"God bless my soul!" he cried, springing actively up from his low chair. "I had no idea it was so late. My packing still only half finished, and you, ah, your beauty sleep. Time for little boys and girls to be in bed, Mrs. Oxney. But this little boy has still to finish his packing. He will be glad when the day comes for him to pack again and return to charming Wentworth."

Mrs. Oxney was almost daring enough to help in the mosaic making. But perhaps that was a little too modern and she contented herself with reciprocating his wish.

"Come back soon, Colonel," she said. "Your room will always be ready for you and I hope I shall have a little surprise in store for your return. It won't be Wentworth without you."

EPILOGUE

FLORENCE and Alice happened to go to the Zoölogical Gardens on the afternoon of the day when Colonel Chase's letter of condolence on the loss of the semi-detached villa had arrived. There they visited the monkey house, and observing the antics of a most indelicate and ill-favoured ape exclaimed simultaneously:

"The colonel!"

"So like, and just that swaggering manner!" said Alice.

"And look at him chattering with rage," said Florence. "Just like his face when there came that avalanche of walnuts. Poor Mabel!"

"But this one chatters because there are no nuts," said Alice. "Otherwise there's no difference at all."

"Let's get him some nuts," said Florence, "and we'll see how he behaves when he eats. That'll be a test if he's really the colonel."

This was done; they burst into shrieks of laughter.

"So it *is* the colonel," said Alice. "No one else eats like that: no one could. What a sad change for him! No pedometer and bicycle rides. But I dare say that swinging on that rope does as well and he tells them all how many times he has swung."

They laughed again and the keeper asked them not to irritate the animals.

The month's honeymoon had gone in a sunny flash, and now after Florence's Christmas visit to Bournemouth they were back in the flat again and had settled down. Alice was terribly busy over the most important picture of her career, Winter Sunset in Kensington Gardens, a very large sketch. She painted chiefly in the morning, because it was warmer then, but often came back toward dark for colour notes. Florence always sat on a camp stool to her right, in order to keep the admiring connoisseurs of London from encroaching too near her right elbow.

To-day at breakfast Florence was urging her friend to take a morning off, for she thought she had been working too hard.

"Besides, darling," she said, "the sun's so very bright. You can't paint dusk in very strong sunlight: you've often said so. There'll be plenty of gray days. And you do look a little tired. Stay quiet this morning: you may play the piano."

"Are those Doctor Florence's orders?" asked Alice, picking up the *Times*.

"Yes, and she's very firm. This afternoon we'll go to the Zoo again and see how the colonel is getting on. We haven't seen him for an age."

Alice's eye had been travelling down the first column of the outside sheet: her answer to Doctor Florence was a shrill scream.

"Flo darling," she cried. "Talk of the colonel and he'll appear. Here, the very first thing I saw. Guess!"

"Oh, is he dead?" asked Florence.

"No, guess again."

"Not married?" she asked.

"Yes. Listen! 'On Jan. 4, 1927, at St. Giles's Church, Bolton Spa, by the Reverend Hildebrand Banks, M.A., assisted by the Reverend Eustace Toogood'—yes, it's coming presently—'Colonel Albert Chase, late of the Indian Army, to Margaret Oxney, widow of the late Septimus Oxney of Wentworth, Bolton Spa.' "

"My dear, let me look!" cried Florence. "Well, I never! Did you?"

"That settles it," said Alice. "We must go to the Zoo, not this afternoon but at once, and congratulate him."

They bought a bag of wedding nuts. The colonel was swinging madly on his rope.

"Probably doing a record," said Alice. "Come, Colonel! Such delicious nuts."

The colonel paid not the least attention to them but when he had broken his record, sat and cuddled up to a stout, rather comely lady-ape, who received a few trivial connubialities with marked favour.

"And Mrs. Oxney," said Alice.

THE END